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MAUD BINGLEY.



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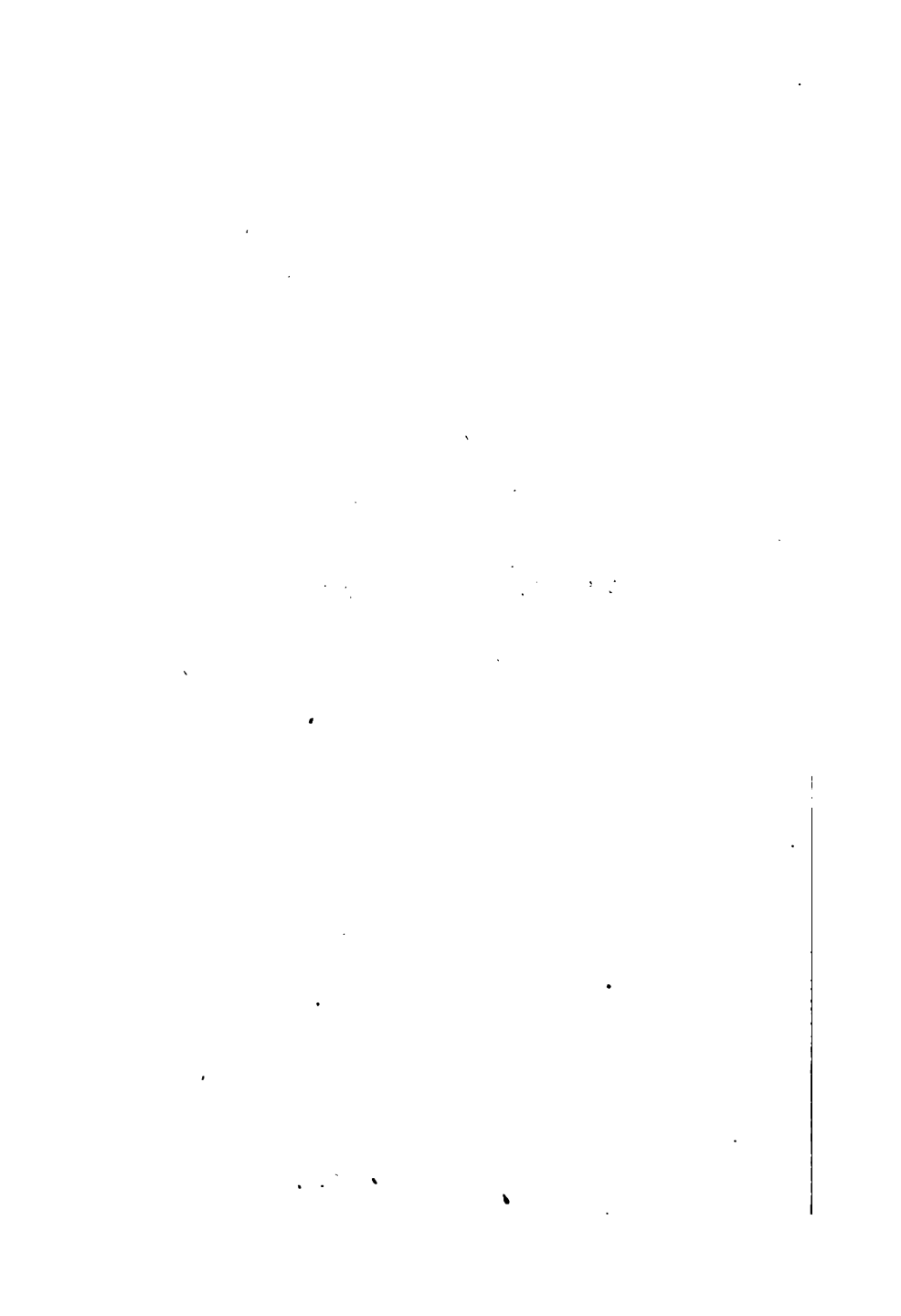
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MAUD BINGLEY.





MAUD BINGLEY.

BY FREDERICA GRAHAM.

"She has a hidden strength."—*Comus*.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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MAUD BINGLEY.

CHAPTER I.

"I saw the drooping pall and plumes,
The priest bareheaded, in his fluttering vest,
The group of sable mourners 'mid the tombs,
The kerchiefs white to stooping faces prest."

EMMELINE HINKMAN.

THE sighing wind sang a mournful requiem enough, as it slowly and sadly swayed the boughs of the tall fir-trees to and fro, which overshadowed the road skirting Tor churchyard. It was a bleak, keen, garish day, towards the end of February, and though the morning sun shone down with a force that told of winter's soon giving way to spring, as yet no green leaves or budding grass gave softness to the rays, which played as pitilessly on the black draperies of a group yet gathered round an open grave, as did the rough, northern blast which mocked its fictitious warmth.

The last prayer had been said, the final blessing had been pronounced, the officiating priest and attendant clerk had lingered a few minutes longer than usual out of sympathy for the youthful mourners, whose grief was so undisguised; but they, too, had withdrawn now, and the old sexton was meditating whether it were not better to cut short a painful scene by commencing duties, ordinary enough to him, when he was attracted by a slight stir among those few solitary individuals. It was a young girl, who moved slowly round till she stood where the name and date inscribed on the dark lid of the coffin was plainly visible.

ISABELLA BINGLEY,

Born July 1st, 1803,

Died February 17th, 1853.

She did not sigh or sob, but there was something so dolorous and pitiful in the tear-stained cheeks and heavy swollen eyelids, that now for the first time were raised to view, that the old man was touched, and interested despite of his vocation, and when a few moments after she lifted her eyes to the face of the tall, handsome brother, who drew her hand beneath his arm, he muttered to himself, "Certain she do favour my poor Nelly uncommon,

an she ain't quite so pretty," while as he spoke he turned his bleary eyes towards a far-off corner of that crowded churchyard, where in her narrow bed—environed now and hemmed in by many another grave and crowding marble monument—his dark-haired daughter had slept these thirty years and more.

He was accustomed to the sight of these closely-set mounds of earth, whose numbers each year, still more each spring, so sadly multiply and increase; but as Maud Bingley turned at the wicket-gate, for one last look at the place where they had just laid the dead, her tears flowed afresh at the pang of thus leaving desolate, and among a crowd, the mortal remains of the mother, whom in life she had loved so fondly, for whose poor worn body she had hardly in death learned to cease her cares.

Even in careless, happy, bygone days, which now seemed very far off, Maud had been wont to dwell with a sympathizing pity, almost prophetic of a sorrow she had never suffered herself to realize, on the records and names of the many here sepulchred, far from home and friends or kindred dust. It was the same sad story told over and over again, even though its phases varied. All had alike come here to die, the young and happy,

as well as those on whom the weightier cares of advancing life had pressed so heavily, that the frail body sank beneath the burden long ere the calm, quiet days of old age had been attained.

Each gravestone told its tale of sorrow. From many a distant county and inland region they had been brought, whose last earthly bed is caverned in the old churchyard on the shore. The young head of many a cherished child lies coldly pillowed here, far from the warm hearth their death has left so desolate: the fair daughter for whom her mother's heart yet yearns; the son of brightest promise, cut off in the heyday of his youth and strength, alike sleep beneath the grassy sod; a thousand tender joys and fond hopes, never to be reawakened, slumbering with them. The best and brightest, the brave and fond, alike take their places here; the father, whose face and cares the boy will grow up to forget; the mother, for whose living love her children may vainly long—severed from all human ties, they yet may rest in hope of that great day when the earth shall give up her dead, and the Lord shall gather His elect from the four winds of Heaven.

It was a grief common enough, it is true, but none the less had it come home to those four lonely

mourners, as they dwelt sadly enough on the contrast between the burning battle-field, where their father lately met death so gloriously, and the bed of suffering, where their mother's life had worn thread by thread away. Land and sea rolled between their graves, but were not the lives so long divided now at last reunited?

Such was the thought uppermost in the mind of each, which the elder brother was the first to put into words, so soon as they were in motion towards their home.

"My poor father! When I gave him a soldier's hasty burial, how little did I think that in less than a year I should follow my mother also to the grave!"

"And this very spring, too, to which she had so long looked forward, as the period fixed for his return," responded Arthur, with a heavy sigh.

"From first to last, it has been a year of misfortunes, that's the truth," broke in Edgeworth abruptly, "and it's to be hoped that, having come to the worst, matters may mend, else we shall all die in the workhouse."

Neither brother answered. Herbert raised his eyes in the uttermost surprise, but Edgeworth had sunk back moodily into his corner, while the one expression on Arthur's face was that of extreme

anxiety. He was inured to these ebullitions on Edgeworth's part, but he was distressed by the effect his words took on Maud. From the moment they had entered the carriage she had sat motionless, tearless, and speechless, but now with quivering lips and burning cheeks she spoke:—

“What would poverty, or debt, or any loss signify if Mamma only lived?” and her passionate words died away in sobs.

“You ought to have sense enough to know that these things just made all the difference to her,” persisted Edgeworth surlily.

“For God's sake spare the living,” began Herbert—he was going to add, “if you have no respect for the dead,” but he checked the hasty speech, for Arthur made a gesture of entreaty as he leant across to open the window by his sister.

Not a word more was spoken; but when they reached the door of the little house upon the hill, where they had lately made their home, Arthur lifted rather than helped his sister out of the carriage. The struggle with so many contending feelings had left Maud deadly pale, and she stood against the door-post, unable to move, and quivering in every limb.

“She will be better upstairs and in quiet,” said

Arthur compassionately, and addressing his eldest brother. "Will you send Bridget, Herbert, and"—a glance towards Edgeworth concluded his sentence.

Captain Bingley understood that the best and kindest thing he could do would be to keep his youngest brother with him; but, as he had yet to learn, Edgeworth was not the most tractable being in the world, and in the moment Herbert's back was turned to summon nurse Bridget, he took the opportunity of walking off upstairs.

"Won't you come in here?" said his brother, who was just in time to catch sight of him through the banisters.

But Edgeworth either did not or would not hear, and Herbert entered the small, close sitting-room alone. At this moment it did not wear its happiest aspect; no token of feminine presence relieved the hard dulness of the ordinary lodging-house furniture; the books had been heaped on chairs to make way for the breakfast equipage, which, though used two hours before, still held its place; a side-table was littered rather than spread with papers and writing materials, which had been searched over night; the flowers were dry and withered, not only in a glass upon the chimney-piece, but in a small stand near the sunniest window. In short, to sum


up the whole, it wore the appearance of a room which had of late been inhabited by the sterner sex only, and to which the rare efforts of a mere household drudge had not sufficed to impart even the common comfort of neatness.



CHAPTER II.

"Does all he does with single mind,
And does to others what is kind."

From the German.

ERBERT Bingley was almost a stranger in his home, if such it could be called. He had gone to India at eighteen, and, returning after twelve years' service, he had hardly been in England as many days, when his mother died. It was a sad welcome back for one, who, in the long years of absence, had come by force of habit and example to look on "home" as an elysium of promise and delight, and to make that so long unattainable, a centre round which all the hopes and wishes of an imaginative temperament had been wont to cluster. Susceptible of outward influences as any woman, he had been well-nigh overpowered by the sad circumstances which heralded in his return to his native land.

It was part of his nature to be subject to quick revulsions of feeling; but there had been no escape from grief here, and it was with a heavy heart and clouded brow that he turned to the hitherto closed window, and, mechanically drawing up the blind, stood casting vacant regards down upon the straggling and irregular buildings of many a sombre hue, which, clustering about the quay, contrasted strangely enough with the gay and glittering sea beyond. He wondered what Maud had meant when she had one day spoken of the aspect as good; and, listening to the tread of footsteps and the hum of subdued voices upstairs, he only fell to musing more sadly and sorrowfully than before.

It was not long before his meditations were broken in upon by Edgeworth, who, finding old Bridget would not admit him into his sister's room, generally the victim to his vagaries, preferred bestowing his company upon his stranger brother to being left to the society of his own thoughts.

Edgeworth, a delicate youth of nineteen, was not unlike what Herbert remembered his second brother to have been some ten years before. He had been very fond of this brother, for they had been sent home from India as children together, had been educated at the same schools, and finally

had gone to India in company. The younger of the two, however, had taken a disgust to the profession of arms, had thrown up his commission in the Company's service, and gone to seek his fortunes in Australia, and of late years John had been almost as much lost to his relations as the brothers and twin sisters who ended their short lives in India. It was not till the certain tidings of his death came, to add to the troubles of a year which had opened darkly enough, that any knew how strong had been the hope of his ultimate restoration.

It was this resemblance which inclined Herbert to fall into the general custom of petting and spoiling the youngest and most delicate of the family. This practice had not tended to increase Edgeworth's amiability, and Herbert was only just beginning to arrive at a knowledge of the spoilt boy's failings, for Edgeworth, only summoned from Haileybury when his mother's life was despaired of, had been too much shocked and subdued at first to show himself in his true colours. At this moment, however, his depression was taking the form of extreme irritation, and, without saying a word, he rung the bell with such startling vehemence, that Herbert turned round and hastily inquired what could be the matter.

“The matter ! Did you ever see such a wretched hole ?”

Herbert would not allow himself to admit as much, he said, “It did not signify,” but his countenance plainly betrayed he more than half acquiesced in his brother’s opinion. Edgeworth saw it, and proceeded to act on the encouragement he chose to think he had received, and his hasty summons answered by a meek-looking handmaiden, expended his ill-humour in reproaches on the state of affairs, which, it must be confessed, were not altogether undeserved.

Order having been in some measure restored, he drew a chair exactly in front of the fire, and, balancing the poker on his forefinger, remarked with an expression of infinite contempt :—

“This is what Arthur and Maud call living with economy. You’d better have come home a year or two ago, Herbert, there was something like comfort at Brabœuf.”

“If my father had only lived to come home !” returned Herbert, with a suppressed sigh.

“Everything would have gone right then,” said Edgeworth, with something like emotion. “Still, when the news of his death first came, my mother was not half so ill as she was afterwards, when

Arthur and Maud persuaded her to move into this wretched little house ; I shall always say it killed her."

"No, no, you cannot think so, you should not allow yourself to put such fancies into words," exclaimed Herbert earnestly. "In her state of health, my poor mother was sure to suffer from the shock of hearing bad news. She might bear up for a time, but it was certain to tell on her eventually."

"You may say just what you please," returned Edgeworth doggedly. "I know she was not half so ill in the summer, when Maud chose to take alarm, as she was in the autumn ; and we left Brabœuf last September."

He evidently considered this an unanswerable argument, and, however little Herbert might agree with him, he was so far tolerant of Edgeworth's ferment of mind as to refrain from actually contradicting him, and he only answered :—

"Her one great loss, to say nothing of the troubles and anxieties which followed, were enough to overwhelm one so fragile, without counting up minor trials."

Edgeworth had nothing to say to this. It was not likely that he or any of her children should

perceive their mother's faults—faults now buried with her in the grave; still, though they knew it not, there was little doubt that the undisciplined petulance, with which Mrs. Bingley had met the trials of the past twelve months, had done more towards loosening her hold on life than any of the ailments, real or fancied, which for years past had constituted her an invalid. But she was dead, and the one who had most suffered from her faults was the being in the world who was least likely to allow it to be possible that her mother could do wrong.

Dinner came before Edgeworth had time to broach any more of his views, and with it Arthur made his appearance. He said Maud was not well enough to come down, he had persuaded her to stay upstairs, and was so evidently out of spirits himself, that for once in a way Edgeworth refrained from complaining of the dinner-hour, which exceedingly displeased him, inasmuch as he had discovered that the eating of the principal meal of the day at two o'clock was another phase of the economy he so disliked. Such as it was, it was soon over; no one cared to linger over the table, nor did any one seem much disposed to speak; the influences of the day pressed heavily on the minds of each

one of the party, and a return to the ordinary topics of conversation appeared impossible. As for Edgeworth, he testified the disquiet he could not but feel by an extreme restlessness. First he tried the armchair, then moved to the sofa, and finally, having failed in his endeavours to fall asleep, he proclaimed his intention of "going out to smoke a pipe on the hills."

"Come on, Arthur!"

Arthur shook his head.

"You said just now you wanted a walk, Herbert," and Edgeworth turned to his eldest brother.

Captain Bingley was one of those people who are easily led, and the sight of Arthur, who sat disconsolately enough, newspaper in hand, but without attempting to read, had made him change his mind.

"I don't think I care to go out to-day."

Edgeworth remonstrated in no very measured terms, but it was no use. He only made Herbert more determined. He did not say much, however, and it was not till some five minutes later, when the house-door banged sharply, that he took any notice of Edgeworth's overbearing manner, and then he turned to Arthur, saying:—

"It strikes me that young fellow has not the best of tempers."

Arthur looked up in some surprise.

"It's more manner than anything else," said he apologetically, "he does not mean to be ill-tempered."

"It was more than that this morning, I confess I thought he showed very bad feeling."

"Edgeworth has felt the change in our circumstances terribly," returned the other, "and it is a sort of way he has got into of harping on anything that annoys him, and I really don't think he knows how much he tries others."

"If you think of it," remarked Herbert, "he is likely to be better off than any of the family. He will have his five hundred a year from the moment he sets foot in India."

"Yes, but he does not realize that as yet," remarked Arthur, "and Edgeworth may well feel his loss."

There was a pause, and then Herbert said, "I should have thought Maud would have been the favourite."

"She was more necessary to my mother, perhaps, who never could bear her out of her sight, particularly after she became so very ill," said Arthur sadly, "but Edgeworth was the one of us who always had his own way. You see as a child

he was often ailing, and he has had more than one bad illness since, which naturally led to his being made a good deal of."

"I can understand it all," remarked Herbert, "but when he gets out into the world he will not find other people so tolerant."

Arthur had nothing to urge in deprecation of this opinion. It was very certain, that, despite his kindly excuses, he felt Edgeworth's faults more than he liked to allow to Herbert, perhaps even to himself, and he would have been even more annoyed had he known the tenor of the remarks with which the individual in question had been favouring their elder brother in the course of that very day.

"It strikes me," continued Herbert, "that Maud is really the most delicate of the two; in fact I don't believe Edgeworth had anything the matter with him last week, when he said he had a cold, and kept her running up and down stairs for him all day."

"He is rather exacting, and very fanciful," was the answer, "but Maud has never been ill in all her life till now."

Arthur spoke positively, though a deeper shade of anxiety passed over his thoughtful face, as he turned eagerly to his brother, and if the subject of

their discussion had been present, she would have divined, from the manner in which Arthur sat looking straight before him, that Herbert's careless words had taken hold of his mind.

"I shall speak to —— to-morrow. It would never do to have her ill," said he, at length.

"By the way," said Herbert, "I have never liked to ask before her, but has anything been settled about Maud? Did my mother make any arrangements for her future?"

"She did all she could; as you know, she has left her everything."

"It is not more than a thousand pounds that comes to her, is it?" persisted the elder brother; "you know more about the English affairs, Arthur, than I do."

"It can't be more, it may possibly be less," returned he, in a voice which testified his painful interest in the subject.

He paused a moment, and went on with the manner of one who would resolutely subdue any shrinking from the topic before him.

"When we left Brabœuf everything was sold that was of any value; but there were claims to be met, and bills to be paid, which swallowed up the greater part of the money, and I don't believe the residue will do more than pay for Edgeworth's out-

fit and passage, even if it quite covers other expenses."

"What is to be done?" said Herbert; "Maud will not have more than forty or fifty pounds a year at the outside."

"I did think of her living with me; it must be possible for two people to live on two hundred a year, or how do half the world manage to exist?"

Herbert asked no further explanation, but resuming, said, "Let me see, there is not much more than two years' difference between Maud and yourself? One ought not to forget the ages of one's own brothers and sisters, but I am ashamed to say I don't feel certain about her's. There were so many little ones, and my poor mother, when she lost one child, always gave another the same name, which made it so confusing."

"Maud was twenty-one her last birthday, I shall be twenty-four in the autumn, and Edgeworth is just nineteen," was Arthur's concise reply.

"It would have suited better if she were nineteen; then there would have been the pension from the fund for two years, at all events," replied Herbert.

"Yes, in our circumstances any addition of income would be acceptable," said Arthur.

"What do you say to India? Maud might well

go to India!" exclaimed his brother, as if the idea had that moment suggested itself. "It is really a better place for ladies than any of the colonies, and a year or so in England will be quite enough for me, I fancy."

Arthur could not bring himself to assent as warmly as he felt he ought to this proposition. It was a contingency he had already forced himself to look fairly in the face, and he knew that the day that parted him from his sister would be the saddest in a life which had not been without its hardships.

"The truth is," persisted Herbert, "as far as I can see, sooner or later India must be the place for Maud. You are not likely to remain in England for very long, you are safe to be sent on foreign service one of these days."

"We are under orders," said Arthur, but so quietly that his brother took no heed of his desponding tone, and continued:—

"In India Maud may claim her pension, you will remember, and keep it too, as long as she remains unmarried."

Arthur bit his lips in silence.

"Her's is just the sort of beauty which takes in India," continued Herbert, to whose mind the idea

never presented itself that Arthur could see anything derogatory to his sister in what he meant as high praise. "We see too much of black hair and flashing eyes among the natives to think anything of them in comparison with a blonde or brunette; I hardly know which to call Maud."

An angry colour burnt on Arthur's cheek, but he controlled himself, and only remarked dryly, "that, after all, Maud was the person who must decide her own fate."

"Let her only say she will go out the end of this year, or the beginning of next," proceeded Herbert, taking Arthur's coincidence in his opinion for granted; "and I will arrange so as to take her out myself, and," added he, thinking his brother received this proposition rather coolly, "I assure you it might make all the difference in Maud's future prospects, if she had anyone to manage for her on her arrival who understood India and Indian habits."

Still no answer.

"You must talk to her about it, Arthur; you have more influence over her than anybody, I can see."

Arthur rose and walked restlessly to the window and back again.

"Eh, Arthur?" added Herbert cheerfully, but the next moment he was surprised by Arthur's saying:—

"It's all very well talking, but I can't do it, I can't persuade her," he cried, with passionate earnestness, and then half ashamed he turned away. "It may be very wrong, I believe it is very selfish, but I could as soon cut off my right hand as urge Maud to do a thing which I know would be so repugnant to her feelings, and to mine too ——"

He stopped abruptly, recalled to a consciousness of what he was saying by the black look of disappointment on Herbert's face.

"I know it is very considerate and kind of you," began he afresh; "it is not every man who would give up the best part of his furlough for the sake of a sister whom he has hardly seen since he was a child," and he wrung his brother's hand warmly; "but if I could express to you what Maud has been to me, how I have depended on her for sympathy, talked with her of the future in days when things were so very different."

Herbert Bingley might be deficient in tact, and wanting in judgment, but he was anything but lacking in feeling. He was not one of those people who see in a moment what others are suffering, but

when it did become apparent, he was all sympathy directly.

"Don't mind what I say, Arthur," began he, "I can't conceive what made me press the point so strongly, but there's time enough before us yet. A thousand chances may turn up between this and the end of the year."


"It may be so," said Arthur, who had now recovered his composure. "But I think we ought to look the matter in the face. Only," added he sadly, "I can't urge it on Maud; I will lay the case before her."

"If you think she won't like it, it would be better not to make a formal business of it, perhaps," said Herbert. "Let the idea come upon her gradually, or creep out in the common course of conversation. It would be the most natural thing in the world when we are all talking together."

"Not to-day," said Arthur hastily, who had no very great reliance on the discretion of his brother.

CHAPTER III.

"Those weary hours of widowhood,
How heavily they go!"—A.

 HE next day, and the next, came and went, with many others in their train, but Maud was in no condition to be talked to, or to talk. At first she was supposed to be suffering from a cold, which old Bridget, who was a great authority in such matters, was positive had been caught on the day of her mother's funeral.

"Miss Bingley hadn't left the house for weeks, and she must needs go out with the east wind blowing, and when I told her it was more fitting she should be at home."

Then it was allowed to be influenza, and finally it became apparent that, be the form what it might in which her illness had first showed itself, it arose from something very different from an ordinary

chill, for the poor girl could neither leave her bed nor raise her head, and almost before she began to complain her strength was utterly prostrate. In truth, only the name was lacking to make it a long, low fever.

Arthur's anxiety knew no bounds; day after day, hour after hour, were passed by him, in silent, watchful anticipation, beside his sister's sick-bed. Maud did not appear to suffer, but the active principle of life seemed to have died within her, and with it had departed every trace of the energy, activity, and forethought, which had ever formed the integral parts of her character. For weeks and weeks she never asked a question or hazarded a remark, she had not strength even for an unnecessary word; but she would lie and look at Arthur with such sad, wistful eyes, and smile her thanks for any little service with such a piteous sweetness, that the thought would sometimes force itself upon him whether it were not vain to weary himself concerning a future which might never dawn for her on earth. Once, and once only, he hinted his fears to old Bridget.

"Whatever put that in your head, Mr. Arthur?" was the answer he got. "How came you ever to think of such a thing?" repeated she angrily.

"I hardly know when it first struck me," was the sorrowful response, "but if you remember, Bridget, it is four weeks to-day since my sister left her room."

"And four months ago and more, how was it with her?" asked the old woman quickly. "Up of nights, striving and driving all day to make things pleasant and comfortable," continued she, in answer to her own query. "If you mind it rightly, Mr. Arthur, I told you how it would be when Fowler and the other servants went away, and Miss Bingley undertook the entire nursing of her mamma."

Arthur sighed.

"Now don't go and fret about it, Mr. Arthur," resumed his old nurse, softening in a minute, "it was always your way from a child, to dwell on things, and take them to heart; now you'll see if I'm not right, Miss Bingley will get stronger after a time, and depend on it, it's a better thing for her to be lying here and taking her rest like, than to be up and worrying about things which can't be helped."

"Perhaps it is;" but still Arthur did not look satisfied.

"I mayn't perhaps put it rightly," resumed old Bridget; "I never was much of a scholar in my

best days, but sure enough, Mr. Arthur, ' God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.'"

" Yes," returned the young soldier seriously, " and learned or not, Bridget, you may remember one thing, you were the first person who ever taught me that cares and joys are not of our choosing, no, nor every man's lot of his own seeking."

He walked quickly away, while Bridget, who, whatever she might feel, was not often prone to exhibit any outward evidences of emotion, wiped her spectacles, and remarked to herself her " eyes were getting dim."

" I always said he was too good to live," soliloquized she, after an interval of thought; " and though he's a gentleman grown, and an officer too, I don't see there is much difference in him since the days, when he would get out of his bed on moonlight nights to see if the angels weren't coming to fetch him."

Like many another of her class, Bridget's strong good sense and long experience often stood her in stead of either book learning or a more cultivated judgment. Higher authorities might talk of the " shock she had sustained," and speak of " the influenza" as an epidemic accompanied with more or less of fever according to the constitutions

it attacked ;" but from first to last she maintained " her young lady had only been doing too much," and, looking back upon the year's accumulated troubles, Arthur only wondered his sister had not succumbed sooner beneath their weight.

Twelve months had hardly passed since Colonel Bingley had met his death in a sharp engagement, which terminated alike his life and the rebellion of a native tribe; and the news of his death first reached his wife through the medium of the public papers. It was a dreadful shock to one with whom the world had hitherto always gone smoothly, and who, in the course of a life which had occupied nearly half a century, had learned no one single lesson of resignation and submission. Mrs. Bingley had never so much as contemplated the possibility of her husband's dying; she had always looked forward to his return as a halcyon time, often indeed delayed, on which she had concentrated a thousand fond and fanciful wishes, and meanwhile had spent the interval of their separation as if life had for her no sterner duty than that of passing each day with ease and unconcern.

For weeks after the blow fell, which made her children fatherless, and herself a widow, Mrs. Bingley hung on the conjoining verge of life and

death. Her constitution had received a very severe shock, beneath which she succumbed without the strength, mental or bodily, to rise. At length she rallied, brought back to earth, perchance, by the cares and prayers of her only daughter, but only to fall prostrate once more beneath the weight of another trial, which, though of a very different nature, affected her daily life almost more sensibly.

His sudden death had found Colonel Bingley's monetary affairs in a state of almost inextricable confusion, and it very soon became apparent that little or nothing would remain for his family beyond the pension to which Mrs. Bingley was entitled as an officer's widow. She was not a person who had ever troubled herself with pecuniary considerations. Her husband had made her a very handsome allowance; he had expressed a wish that his sons and daughter should receive an education which should fit them for any position in life, and taking his instructions literally, their mother had lavished on them advantages which were regulated by no single consideration of economy or prudence.

She had never cared to live in any state or magnificence, but, at the same time, she had never denied herself the gratification of a single wish. These did not lead her into any great expenses, for

Mrs. Bingley did not care for society, and till she was really ill, she had always found a species of excitement—a quiet and indolent one, it is true—in fancying herself an invalid. Such having been her mode of life for years, it may be imagined how great was the change when the simple fact of her husband's unexpected death obliged her to look poverty in the face, and to resign not only luxuries, but a thousand insignificant comforts which had, by the force of habit, become almost essential to her existence.

There was a future, too, which not only perplexed those now left behind, but the dread alone of which might well trouble and sadden the poor mother's last days on earth. The only source of income which would survive herself was a small sum which had been settled on her by her father at the time of her marriage, and which now in her turn Mrs. Bingley bequeathed to her only daughter. To secure even this solitary thousand pounds intact for Maud had been a matter of some difficulty, and it had been for the sake of leaving it untouched to her daughter that Mrs. Bingley had insisted on selling her jewels, her costly furniture, her carriage, everything, in fact, which was more valuable than necessary. Money had been required to discharge

some outstanding bills ; a part had been appropriated to finishing Edgeworth's education, and providing him with an outfit for India, for he was to leave Haileybury at midsummer ; and the residue, reserved for some special occasion, did but, as Arthur informed his brother, just suffice to cover the expenses consequent on their mother's illness and her death.

But one earthly hope was left to Mrs. Bingley, and though she said little on the subject, it was to this she clung with all the pertinacity of a dying woman. She had only one relation in the world, and that relation was a sister who had married long after her nephews and niece had been born ; but there had been a quarrel between the families since, and for years all intercourse had ceased between those more closely united by the tie of blood than by affection.

So long as they had been left under her sole charge, " Aunt Sophia" had taken a very proper interest in her sister's children ; but when their mother came home they had differed upon some slight point—regarding Maud, as it happened—and they had parted in anger never to meet again this side the grave.

Upon what proved to be her death-bed, and in

the extremity of her anxiety for her daughter, Mrs. Bingley had written to her more prosperous sister, but no notice had been taken of her appeal. Mr. and Mrs. Murray were at this time in Scotland, and it was supposed that this letter had never reached its destination; but, considering the disposition and circumstances of her to whom it was addressed, it may be doubted whether such an appeal was likely to meet with a very favourable reception.

Mrs. Bingley never held up her head after the time when, in all its keen significance, this disappointment was added to all her other trials. To her children, at the moment, it counted as a mere trifle, but from henceforth, as they remembered afterwards, their mother seemed to have given up all active interest in her worldly concerns; she must perforce leave the issue in the hands of that higher Power, whose fiat had gone forth against her. In point of fact, a crisis arrived in her disease when she was too utterly prostrate to decide upon, or even to be asked to direct, any course of action. It remained, therefore, for Maud and Arthur to act as best they might upon the intelligence transmitted from India by their elder brother, on whom the management of their father's affairs had devolved.

Edgeworth, who was at home for his summer vacation when the news first came, opposed himself to every scheme of retrenchment; and had it not been for their old nurse Bridget, the brother and sister, who, with no practical experience, were now called on for the first time in their lives to decide in a case of emergency, would have been sorely puzzled after what fashion to carry into effect the retrenchments, the whole responsibility of which their mother had thrown upon them.

Thanks to the partiality Mr. Murray had felt for him as a boy, Arthur had been educated at Woolwich, where he had earned his commission in the Royal Artillery, and he consequently had what is called more knowledge of the world than his sister, the better part of whose life had been spent ministering to her mother's ailments and amusement, picking up the while, as best she could, a desultory sort of education at the hands of such tutors and instructors as came in her way.

One lesson Maud had learnt thoroughly, and that was to live for others; and when it came to leaving their home, and reducing their establishment, the onus of the petty details and every-day anxieties which these changes involved, fell on her young head. It was a dark, dreary winter for his

daughter, which succeeded the eventful summer following on Colonel Bingley's death. Arthur was obliged to be with his regiment. Edgeworth, who resented the change in his home, as though it had been a personal injury to himself, did not choose to come to Torquay, but spent Christmas with the family of a fellow-collegian, and Maud was left alone to watch beside the dying bed of a mother whose end, if long delayed, was approaching slowly and gradually, yet surely. As they passed, those days seemed to revolve heavily enough ; but in the retrospect, and in the years yet to come, when the sharp sting of pain should have passed away, they to the daughter's heart would be replete with a melancholy, tender joy.

There came a time when the repining murmurs and reiterated lamentations, which had marked the commencement of poor Mrs. Bingley's illness, gradually ceased, and Maud hoped that the worst was passed, and in the strength of her youth and faith believed that convalescence must surely follow. It was not so ; Mrs. Bingley herself knew that it could not be. Her eyes were at last opened, and as through a long vista, which, day by day, curtailed its length, she marked the slow and certain approach of the Angel of Death, the fluttering of

whose wings, unheeded by one instinct with life and health, fell with a terrible distinctness on ears listening for his awful summons.

Perchance that pause between sentient life and the putting on of immortality, which we poor mortals call Death, was sent in mercy to one whose childhood, youth, and riper age had been made up of negative virtues, and if it be not inconsistent with the Catholic religion so to speak, of negative sins also.

Mrs. Bingley did not die as she had lived. In those hours of silent weakness none but "He to whom all hearts are open, and all desires known," marked the secret working of the leaven of true penitence; but its outward influence was clearly enough developed in the latest acts of a life which had for their sole object not self, but the welfare of those—soon to be seen no more—who yet remained on earth.


CHAPTER IV.

“ She could creep about
The long bare rooms, and stare out drearily
From many a narrow window on the street.”

AURORA LEIGH.

“ But God so seldom lets us take
Our chosen pathway.”

The Angel in the House.

 HE four weeks of Maud's illness, which Arthur sighed over so repeatedly, had dragged their slow length along till twice their space was past, when, at last, one bright sunny afternoon Maud made her way down to the little sitting-room for the first time since the day her mother had been buried. At this moment she, certainly, did not much resemble the water-coloured picture of herself, with which Herbert was perpetually comparing his sister; the glowing complexion was almost colourless, and the eyes which laughed and sparkled in the paint-

ing, now by their size and brilliancy made the face look all the more pale and attenuated.

An hour after, when Arthur passed the window and came hastily into the room, he found her with a lap full of letters.

“ Why, Maud, I thought I had stowed them so safely away that you would never be able to find them !”

She looked up and smiled, but it was one of those smiles, which, in that they are forced to the lips, almost sadden more than actual tears.

“ Where is Herbert ?” said she, more for the sake of saying something than because it concerned her to know.

“ I left him at Brabœuf. See, Maud ! The Sandersons are away, so I brought you some flowers from the old garden.”

Brabœuf was the home where the brothers' and sister's happiest days had been spent. It had passed into other hands months ago ; but Maud had never crossed the threshold since strangers had occupied the once familiar rooms, nor glanced within the gates, lest she should catch sight of the young and smiling faces, whom fancy pictured looking upon the verdant lawn and restless sea beyond ; inanimate objects which for years had filled the place of playmates and of friends to her.

Poor Maud ! she had not yet learnt the lesson, the world teaches so well, of quelling every outward expression of feeling till it is doubtful whether even a sensation remains. Now, not only were her spirits crushed and broken, but the usual buoyancy of her character was dimmed by the depressing nature of her late malady, and as with weak and trembling fingers she arranged the sweet spring blossoms in a vase beside her, she quivered with very nervousness lest her brother should approach a subject which she quickly divined was uppermost in his mind.

Arthur was almost as reluctant as herself to enter on the topic of which he was aware the open letter before his sister treated ; still, circumstances impelled him to speak, and to speak quickly, too ; besides which he had the hope that of the two evils, which he was about to lay before her, the one might prove the antidote of the other. Yet, when he looked in her pale face he had not the heart to go straight to the point, though come to it he must ; accordingly he began :—

“ You have Mrs. Murray’s letter there ? ”

A gesture of assent.

“ If she had made the proposition sooner,” proceeded Arthur sorrowfully, “ it would in itself

have sufficed to smooth our poor mother's pathway to the grave. However," added he, more cheerfully, "it is a real kindness any way, and it is not for us to quarrel with the manner in which it is proffered."

"Arthur," said Maud abruptly "I cannot go and live with Aunt Sophia."

This outburst was nothing more than he had expected; he knew exactly how it would be; and ever since he came into the room he had been trying to avert his eyes from the young sorrowing face of his sister, lest he should see the tears he had all along heard in her voice, but now he sat down close beside her.

"It is not, perhaps, in every respect, the home one would choose," said he, in a low tone; "but I think you would prefer it to going to India."

"India!" ejaculated Maud, in a tone of mingled surprise and horror.

"Yes, India," repeated Arthur. "I cannot say I incline to the scheme myself, but there are reasons in favour of it, which it would be wise to take into consideration."

Maud looked up at him in astonishment, and Arthur took advantage of the pause to lay the whole state of the case before her. He told her that there an income, and therefore independence,

such as it was, would be secured to her; and if he did not enlarge on these facts, he dwelt more at length on the kindness and even warmth of feeling Herbert had shown towards her. Their brother would shorten his furlough, would leave England with her when and how she liked best. Her home, too, would be with him.

He kept his word, and then was almost frightened lest he should have prevailed.

"But do you wish it, Arthur?" said Maud, at length. She had been listening intently, and appeared to weigh his every word.

He hesitated a moment, and then she spoke:—

"I cannot do it, I could not leave England, no, not if I were to gain thousands by it, instead of a few scores of pounds," said she, with rising emphasis. "Oh, Arthur, I could not go away—I could not leave you. Think what it would be never, never to see you again till we are old and grey-headed, or, perhaps, not to meet till we stand side by side in Heaven;" and the words died away in sobs.

Arthur had been slow to speak from the very consciousness that ultimately his sister would implicitly defer to his judgment.

"Does not your own heart tell you now, Maud, why I so gladly hail any proposition which may keep you in England?" said he softly.

"But I cannot bear the thoughts of Bankside." It was the petulant girl that spoke, not the earnest, thinking, feeling woman, which Maud at other times showed herself.

Her face was turned towards the window, and Arthur fancied he saw something very like tears falling on the thin, white hands folded before her. He resumed, in low and still more earnest accents:—

"Though I have forborne to urge you hitherto, Maud, or even to speak on a subject very near my heart, believe me this is a point which has never day or night been a hour absent from my thoughts. If there had been any other hope, should I not have been the last to resign it? Do you think that if I saw any possible alternative I should be content to resign my own and only sister into anybody's care, however near a relation, still less to one who has been estranged from us for years?"

This earnest appeal was more than Maud's shattered nerves could bear; she could not speak, but she took her brother's hand which rested on the arm of her chair, and bowed her head, so that he should not see her flowing tears.

It was with an effort that he went on:—"I need not tell you that I have considered the future in every point of view, and not only I, but Herbert

is of opinion that the house of our own mother's sister—as it is open to us now—is the most fitting place of asylum for her orphan daughter; at all events for the present.”

“Herbert does not know ——” began Maud tremulously, but she could not command her voice.

Her brother did not seem to notice this interruption, but she knew by the unusual rapidity of his speech that his feelings were deeply moved.

“I need not remind you that having lived for some years of your life under the same roof with Mrs. Murray,” continued he, “that it seems only natural you should take up your abode with her again.”

“I do not wish to appear either obstinate or ungrateful,” said Maud, “but I cannot easily reconcile myself to the thought of a life of such utter dependence and isolation as I know mine would be if I accepted Aunt Sophia's offer, and went to live at Bankside.”

“What I should like best,” said Arthur, “would be, if we could manage to live together, but I am afraid for the present it is quite out of the question.”

Maud's face brightened at the bare idea, but still her brother sighed.

“At some future day we may, perhaps, carry

out this plan," he continued, "but you must not build on it too much, Maud. We should be together; but we should have to live very economically in a little lodging; I could not take you into barracks."

"I had rather face poverty with you than Bankside by myself, with all its luxuries," said his sister eagerly.

Arthur shook his head.

"I tell you plainly, Maud, it is a harder thing to rub on with a small income than you imagine, for I have had the experience of the last year, and I have found it a very difficult matter indeed to manage on my pay, even in the Artillery, and with every motive a fellow could have to keep him straight."

Her countenance fell, but before she could speak, Arthur went on:—

"Don't think I mean to complain," he said very quickly; "I am fortunate in being in this particular branch of the service, and I can pull through; still, in the army, as at present constituted, so many and such heavy expenses fall on every officer that, 'will he nill he,' almost his whole income is swallowed up before the turn of his own expenses comes."

"Dear Arthur!" and the sister pressed the hand she held more fondly, "I was afraid it must be so, and, perhaps, — it would be better — I should only be a burden to you." She was going to yield about Bankside, but words failed her. She would have been glad to unsay what now seemed to her but selfish objections, but for once in his life Arthur would not let her speak.

"I know that," said he, interrupting her. "Listen to me, Maud," he began hurriedly; "just now I am in a worse plight than ever, I have been transferred into another battalion."

She did not speak, but the little colour which their conversation had brought into her cheeks disappeared, leaving her even paler than before.

"And what is worse still, it has come to my turn to go on foreign service," persisted he, in a voice he would fain make firm.

"Where?" her lips, not her voice framed the inquiry.

"To the West Indies."

He got up and paced to and fro the narrow room. A silence of some minutes ensued; no tears, no lamentations, no sigh, no sound, save his quick footsteps, disturbed the stillness. At last he came round to the back of her chair, so that she could not read his looks.

"Maud, you must help me to bear it—if it had been at any other time—but to leave you just now."

She put up her face to be kissed, she clasped her arms round his neck. "And for three long years?"

Voices were heard in the quiet street. Herbert and Edgeworth were returning, and Maud flew out of the room, and was upstairs in a moment. She flung herself on her knees beside the couch where her mother breathed her last. "Oh! Mamma, Mamma. Oh! Arthur, Arthur!"

It was the only expression of her grief.




CHAPTER V.

"The past, new prospects rise."

Night Thoughts.

"And now I set thee down to try
How thou canst walk alone."

Lyra Innocentium.

 HE Mayday sun was shining brightly into a room where two individuals, albeit they were of a different sex, sat in unbroken silence. It was a long, low, but luxuriously furnished apartment, pannelled with oak, and hung with rich crimson draperies, and the lady, who sat studying her letters behind the urn, was decked in costly array.

A little cap of Brussels point, enlivened by violet ribbons, a rich black silk dress, stiff with embroidery and bugles, and a profusion of black lace, were the adornments of one who, though no longer either young or handsome, could not be content to resign

her claims to what were now possessions of the past.

At the other end of the table sat a young man, who was hardly too old to be the son of the lady in question, but whose frank, open countenance and joyous, fearless eyes belied any claim to so near a relationship. He was exceedingly good-looking without being strictly handsome, with dark brown hair, moustache and whiskers of a much lighter hue, a fresh complexion and a pair of deep blue eyes, which at this moment were looking kindly down upon a long-backed terrier, who was pirouetting and executing an uncouth sort of dance on two legs, for the prospective reward of a piece of meat held tantalizingly beyond his reach. His master was so occupied by his favourite that he did not heed, if indeed he heard a sort of self-pitying sigh breathed by the lady at the head of the table, who, gathering up her letters as she rose, said :—

“ Your cousin is coming to-day, Julian.”

“ Who ? ” repeated he, with a puzzled sort of air.

“ Your cousin, or, if you like it better, my niece Maud Bingley,” returned Mrs. Murray, for it was her.

“ Well, it won’t make much difference to me, I shall scarcely see her, for I must go back to

Hampton Court to-morrow," remarked Julian, flinging down the meat to Rusty, and taking up the newspaper.

"As it happens, it is very unfortunate your uncle should have gone to town early to-day; I don't know what to do about sending to the station."

Mrs. Murray was in the habit of making exactly what arrangements she liked; it was a sure sign she was not pleased when she began to talk of referring any matter to her husband.

"I ought to have got this letter two days ago," proceeded she petulantly; "but from first to last the whole business has been mismanaged, and I really must say, I think we have done a very unwise thing in burdening ourselves with the charge of a girl of whom we know literally nothing."

Julian was the nephew, and had for years of his life been the ward of Mr. Murray, and he was far too well acquainted with the bias of his aunt's mind ever to think it worth his while to dispute the grounds on which she based her prejudices.

"She was not a bad little girl, if I remember right," remarked he, with a lofty evasion of anything like a discussion, "and promised to be pretty rather than the reverse."

"There is no saying how she may have altered

in the course of the last few years," returned Mrs. Murray pettishly. "I don't care about her looks, but I am afraid she is quite spoilt, for her brothers make a ridiculous fuss about her in their letters, and my poor sister was the last person to bring up a girl with anything like rational ideas."

Julian's eyes alone showed that he appreciated to its full extent Mrs. Murray's sisterly affection, otherwise he preserved a perfectly unmoved countenance as he remarked: "I suppose one or other of the brothers are coming with her to-day. Arthur was always a good fellow, but I have not seen him since he left Woolwich."

"I am happy to say he is gone abroad with his regiment, for he is the one who would have been likely to give us most trouble. I suppose I must make up my mind to keep the girl here, but I am resolved not to have those young men hanging about the house."

Julian looked at the speaker with a curious expression of countenance.

"Oh! I was thinking of bringing Vanston and Grey over for a couple of nights next week; but if young men are at a discount, perhaps I had better say nothing about it."

"My dear Julian, your friends are always wel-

come, you might know that," said Mrs. Murray, with an air of reproach, which was meant to be both gentle and fascinating. "It is a very different thing from having the young Bingleys, who are almost penniless, always living upon one."

Julian did not reply, and Mrs. Murray proceeded. "After all, Herbert will soon be the only one of the brothers left in England, and when I see him I shall try and persuade him how much better it would be to go back to India at once. What does he want in England? He has no money, and can have few friends."

"Bite him! roll him over, Rusty!" exclaimed Julian, opening the glass door, as a wretched starveling cur made its appearance on the lawn. "That's the way of the world, ain't it? trample on those who are down, eh, man?"

Mrs. Murray did not so much as redden. "I have so often given orders that no tradespeople are to bring dogs up to the house, nothing makes Mr. Murray so angry. You may be sure this wretched puppy belongs to the butcher or the baker, or some such person," continued she, as Rusty bustled back on finding his adversary beneath his notice.

"Pray don't feed the little wretch, Julian, it is only an encouragement to it to come again."

Julian threw a last bone to the dog, and, as he turned towards the door, said, "I am going over to Hounslow to see about a horse. I shall be home to dinner."

His aunt called him back.

"I don't want to have the carriage out a second time to-day, do you think you could send your dog-cart down to the station this afternoon?"

"To fetch my uncle?"

"No, the carriage goes for him at half-past two, but to bring Maud Bingley herself."

"I thought you did not approve of ladies driving in my cart?" If his words sounded like a refusal, his manner was perfectly courteous.

"Lady Louis Crichton and Maud Bingley are very different people. It would be a great convenience, for otherwise she must have a fly, and I am sure she has not any money to spare."

"I will see what can be done; I don't know about the cart, but I'll undertake to send for the young lady in some way or other," returned Julian; and, satisfied by this pledge, Mrs. Murray retreated into her boudoir to pass her morning easily and luxuriously, without another thought of the poor girl who was henceforth to be dependent on her tender mercies.

Julian walked whistling down the lawn, in a somewhat thoughtful humour.

He had not seen any of the Bingleys for years, nor once set eyes on Maud since the morning her mother carried her off from Bankside in days when he was an Eton boy. But the force of old association was strong enough to make him dislike the tone in which Mrs. Murray spoke of these her own relations. "Poor and penniless!" Times were changed indeed, for he could remember when his aunt had rather plumed herself on the riches and liberality of Mrs. Bingley and her husband. He and Arthur had been sworn allies in their school-days, and Maud, in virtue of her obedience and submission, had often been elected a member of the triumvirate.

They had always called each other cousins, but no tie of blood in reality subsisted between the children, who for nearly two years had shared the same home. Julian's uncle had married Miss Edgeworth very shortly after her father's death, when they had united fortunes and establishments; an arrangement, be it remarked, of which the benefit was entirely on one side.

It is impossible to say why Mr. and Mrs. Murray had married, for they had no one source of interest

or point of character in common. But so it was ; such anomalies are of everyday occurrence, and are likely to continue so long as the world endures. Miss Edgeworth was good-looking at the time of her marriage, but she was poor, so poor that since her father's death she had had little or nothing to call her own, save the remittances made in virtue of the requirements of her sister's children.

Mr. Murray was more than twenty years older than herself ; he had never been handsome, but he was rich. He did not look a likely subject to fall a victim to either passion or sentiment, but whether it were love or destiny the result was the same, and he espoused Miss Edgeworth at the end of a six weeks' acquaintance.

Never were people so thoroughly unsuited to each other ; still, in process of time, they jostled down into that sort of mutual agreement, which, oddly enough, goes by the name of domestic "peace;" their very choice of a residence was neither more nor less than a compromise between two opposite opinions ; the gentleman wishing to live in Scotland, his bride to make an effort after the rank and fashion of either Belgravia or May Fair. Pending a decision, they hired a place in the neighbourhood of Windsor ; and there they stayed, partly because

they could not agree to move, and partly on account of a certain pleasure in possession which made Mr. Murray reluctant to abandon a spot which he had once called his own.

The proprietorship of a mansion north of the Tweed was a great source of pride and pleasure to the worthy merchant, as also to his younger wife, who, rather ashamed of his origin, thought it gave him standing as a country gentleman, but she had no wish to take up her abode near the place where her husband had lived under very different circumstances. The plain truth was that Mr. Murray had begun life as a manufacturer, and had realized his fortune in trade. It had been his ambition from his earliest youth to buy back some estates in Scotland which had once belonged to a distant, and then more prosperous, branch of his family, and it was only when he became a landed proprietor that he ceased to be an active partner in the firm of Murray, Macmillan, and Co.

Julian was Mr. Murray's only brother's only child. Both his parents had died while he was still an infant, and, after having been sorely puzzled what to do with such a legacy, it had ended in his uncle adopting the boy as his heir. His father had been originally a junior partner in the firm;

but Mr. Murray managed his nephew's interests so well during his minority, that when Julian came of age he found himself possessed of a clear thousand a-year ; and if he would only have gone into the business, instead of entering the army, he might immediately have stepped into an income quite as large as that which he was eventually to inherit from his uncle.

It was not surprising that, young and high-spirited, Julian Murray wished to see more of the world than was visible from behind the desk of a manufacturer's counting-house. His mother's brothers had all been military men, and, though his uncle sedulously kept him out of their way, the same taste came to him by inheritance, and nothing would satisfy him but entering on the profession of arms.

Julian Murray was by nature of quite a different order of beings from those who had brought him up, and it was to his credit, that when with independence and knowledge of the world came a more acute perception of their foibles and failings, he did not slacken in his duty and attention.

As far as appearances went there was nothing to be ashamed of in his relations. Mrs. Murray was no longer very young, but she was what is

called a ladylike mannered person; she dressed well, and her good taste extended to her house, her carriage, her establishment, and all those external objects with which the eye more than the mind has to do. With a great show of outward refinement, nevertheless, she had very few of those finer feelings which constitute a really attractive woman, and this was not the first time that her low and sordid views of life had run entirely counter to Julian's more enlarged and unprejudiced understanding.

Meanwhile, poor Maud was anticipating her arrival at Bankside with anything but pleasurable feelings.

"If you were coming with me, Herbert, it would not be half so awful," said she, when, on catching sight of Windsor Castle, she knew that they were nearing the place where they must part. "I dread finding myself in a strange house, and with people I have not seen for years."

"You see our good relations have never said a word about wishing to see me," returned her brother, in rather a resentful tone. "But don't cry, Maud; you will be happy enough, I dare say, when you have got used to the change, and re-

member you and I can go off to India any day if you can't hit it off with Aunt Sophia."

It was easy to bid her dry her eyes, but Maud had not yet recovered from the effects of her long illness. Her fortitude, her self-command had been all expended in the effort to leave her home and all its cherished memories, and say good-by to old Bridget with dry tears and unfaltering voice.

Herbert was going to London.

"It is not far from Windsor, Maud, and even if the Murrays don't ask me to stay, I could come down and see you some day."

His sister tried to thank him through her tears. "Arthur will be better satisfied if I have seen you when I write, so you may look out for me one fine morning."

A moment more and they were at the station; there was scant time for adieux. Herbert was obliged to proceed by the same train, and the appearance of a staid manservant in search of Miss Bingley relieved him from all vacillating doubts as to her reception.

"The brougham for the young lady, a cart for the luggage, and my master's compliments and he hopes soon to see you, Sir."

Herbert was mollified forthwith. "You can explain to my uncle that I am obliged to be in London to-night, Maud," said he, turning to his sister.

The man interposed. "Captain Murray, Sir, it was Captain Murray's message."

Herbert was gone before he clearly understood the difference, and Maud was left to step into the well-appointed equipage, and nerve herself for the meeting with her unknown relatives.

Mrs. Murray was coming up from the conservatory with her husband, when her niece arrived.

"How absurd of Julian to put his horses into the brougham; and I do believe he sent his own man down as well."

"Julian is rather a fine gentleman," said Mr. Murray, in a tone of commendation rather than of reproof. "He likes to do things in style, and I don't know that he's far wrong, he can well afford it."

Maud got out of the carriage, and came down the lawn to meet her aunt. She moved with an elegance and grace, which rather impressed Mrs. Murray, before she came up and saw the pretty face flushed and swollen with recently shed tears.

"Your are not much taller than when I last

saw you, Maud," said she, as she kissed her cheek with more formality than warmth; and that was the kindest greeting Mrs. Murray had for one she ought to have taken to her heart.

If Maud had a sore point, it was her height; her brothers were all so tall, and she was small even for a woman. Besides, a remark on a girl's personal appearance is never an encouraging beginning.

Maud was quite obliged to Mr. Murray, when he said "he should have known her anywhere."

In her own mind she thought she could have returned the compliment with truth. To the best of her recollection, Mr. Murray had not grown a day older in the course of the last ten years. Bald-headed and wrinkled, she had then thought him aged in the extreme in comparison with her aunt. Now he only suggested to her mind the idea of a hale hardy man of sixty-five.

"The place is vastly improved since you were here," remarked her uncle, with great internal satisfaction. Mr. Murray expected everyone to see a change for the better, if he only ordered a bough to be cut off, or a shrub removed.

"Everything is looking very green and pretty," answered Maud.

"Come! you shall just walk round the grounds, there will be time before the dressing-bell rings," returned her uncle.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Murray seemed to have any idea that their visitor might be tired after her long journey; and she was too shy to say anything about it.

"You remember that frightful round pond, Maud," began her aunt, as they turned from the door, "it has been filled up, and makes a nice Dutch garden."

"And the American borders are extended as far as the conservatory," chimed in Mr. Murray. "Besides, we have felled those old fir-trees, and there is a nice view of the Castle on this side, as well as from higher up the lawn."

Such was the tenor of their remarks. Their own possessions, their own interests fully occupied the minds of both.

"Next year we talk of throwing the fields on the back of the house into the paddock," proceeded Mrs. Murray, as they turned towards the shrubberies.

"And if Sir Gervase Goodenough should chance to die," added her husband, "why I have nothing to do but buy up all the land between this and the

river; you know I bought the place last year, Maud."

"He can't live long, he is breaking very fast; I believe, he never leaves his bed now," returned his wife eagerly.

Poor Maud! what painful memories this careless talk called up! She stretched her gaze as she was bidden over the broad meadows and sun-illuminated slopes, but it was not the fresh and verdant hues of spring she saw, but a darkened room, a dying form, a spirit trembling on the verge of an unknown world.

"Come! it's time we were dressing for dinner," said Mr. Murray, rather disappointed that the new arrival was not more talkative.

"I do not make a stranger of you, Maud," remarked her aunt, as they approached the house. "The little room upon the stairs, you know the way without my coming up."

She passed the threshold. Painted ceilings were overhead, soft carpets beneath her feet, open doors revealed rooms crowded with every device that luxury could demand or art supply; even the very passages had their gilded mirrors reflecting back the glowing sunlight and the gorgeous splendour that the merchant prince had concentrated

beneath his aspiring roof ; but there was one thing lacking yet—the love, the fond affection, the kindred ties, which made Maud look back even to the little despised house upon the hill as a haven of peace and comfort.



CHAPTER VI.

“ But now we sat
Stranger than strangers; till I caught
And answer'd Mildred's smile,
And pleased we talk'd the old days o'er.
The Angel in the House.

WHEN Julian returned late in the evening, a third figure was sitting, still and silent as a statue, in the armchair beside the fire in the drawing-room. Well accustomed to the habits of the house, he opened the door softly, and his noiseless step on the thick aubusson carpet disturbed neither the sleepers nor the dreamer.

Mr. Murray's easychair was pushed back into a snug corner, where neither the air from the open window, nor the crackling blaze of the fire on the hearth could possibly interfere with his individual comfort. His breathing, now low, now prolonged into a decidedly nasal strain, left no doubt of the fact that he was fast asleep; neither was it hard

to divine that the eyes of the other, and perhaps the most important occupant of the room, were sealed by slumber rather than closed in meditation, for the form was quiescent, the face expressionless.

Mrs. Murray sat in a half-reclining position near the open window ; the days of her grace and elegance had long gone by, beauty and symmetry having alike vanished beneath the influence of years of luxury and self-indulgence. Time had been when that flushed face was remarkable for a certain delicacy of feature and complexion, almost amounting to beauty ; but an excessive embonpoint now marred both face and form, and yet brought with it none of that voluptuous softness which in some women almost replaces the lost freshness of their youth. Hers could never have been a very pleasing countenance, yet open, the large, dark eyes were almost pretty still ; they did not betray so much hard selfishness as did the thin lines of the tightly closed mouth.

Maud inherited these same lustrous orbs ; but the soul which shone out from beneath her darkly-fringed lids betrayed the wide difference in character between aunt and niece, even more than the striking incongruity of colouring and figure. Julian only remembered her as a pretty little girl ; but

the face that caught his eye, the moment he entered, was decidedly something more. The room was almost dark, save where shaded lamps cast a concentrated light; one stood on a table beside Maud, its brilliant rays lending to both face and figure the semblance of a living picture. There she sat in an attitude of entire repose, her large soft eyes fixed on the bright caverns of the glowing fire, searching into their light with that far-stretching gaze, which is rather the looking out of the soul into futurity, than the perception of palpable objects by the mortal sense. Her thoughts were far away, but none the less had they brought a warmer colour to her cheek, than had glowed there for many a long day, and the curved lines of the red lips were parted, as though she were about to speak.

Julian advanced slowly, with the instinctive feeling, that if he came too near the spell might break, and this fair vision change its aspect; but Rusty was not equally prudent, he crept forward from behind his master to see whom this might be, and unceremoniously thrust his cold nose into the little white hand that hung over the arm of the chair. This proceeding on his part effectually startled Maud from her reverie. She looked up and coloured

with surprise, for there stood Julian on the hearth-rug close to her.

"I did not mean to startle you," said he, in his kindly voice, and holding out his hand.

It was not difficult for him to guess that it was the coldness of her reception of a few hours back, which gave an uncertainty to her manner, even though she greeted him with apparent self-possession.

"I thought I should find you arrived," proceeded he, as he seated himself before the fire, just near enough to carry on a low-voiced conversation. "But where is your brother? I hoped he would come."

Maud explained that Herbert was gone to London.

"We must get him to come down and stay one of these days. I must talk to my uncle about it. Of course he must be here for Ascot, but you will like to see him before then."

Her face even more than her words betrayed her satisfaction at the prospect.

"I cannot recollect whether Herbert was ever here," remarked she. "I know Arthur came to Bankside for both Christmas and summer holidays."

"Oh, yes! Arthur was here of course, and I think Herbert came over from Addiscombe more

than once, but in those days we smaller fry had an infinite dread of our elders."

It did not seem as if Maud had lost it yet, for she looked nervously round when Mr. Murray half awoke and said: "Eh! what's that you're talking about? I'm not asleep."

Julian made a gesture implying the discretion of silence, but after a few minutes he began again.

"So, Arthur is gone to the West Indies?"

"He sailed last Thursday week." She spoke very quietly, but Julian detected a sad inflexion in the tones of her voice.

"They tell me he is such a fine fellow," returned he. "Colonel Knox was dining at our mess last week, and he pronounced him to be one of the most promising young officers in their corps."

If Julian had studied for a month how he could most gratify Maud, he could hardly have succeeded better. He was amused and interested in watching her, for the changes in her mood were as legible in her face, as though it were an open book; and now there was a softness in the eyes which turned towards him, far more eloquent than the words which would not come.

"You see I by no means forget old times," continued he. "Those were merry holidays when we

used to be all up in the schoolroom together. Poor Mademoiselle! she nearly died of it when Arthur made a flare-up with the gunpowder."

"She was not the only person who was frightened," remarked Maud, a little mischievously.

"Well, I rather thought he had spoilt his beauty," was the quick retort. "By the way here comes something edible," said Julian, interrupting himself.

The entrance of the servants brought Mrs. Murray back to consciousness.

"Is that you, Julian? When did you make your appearance? I felt sure you had stayed to dine at Hounslow."

"I wanted to get home," replied he. "As it was, I missed the coach."

"You did not walk!" exclaimed his aunt in surprise.

He nodded an assent.

"Don't be shocked, Miss Bingley, at my venturing to eat in your presence; but it looked so dull and dreary in the dining-room, that I ordered the tray in here," proceeded he.

Maud said something polite, but inaudible. She had frozen back into shy formality from the moment her aunt approached the fire, nor did Mrs. Murray

choose to perceive, that Julian intended to put a stop to her queries.

"You don't mean to say you have not dined?" persisted she.

"I intended to be back here to dinner, but I did not fancy the horse I went over to buy, so I did not ride home as I intended."

"How's this, Julian! walking from Hounslow? why that is something quite new!" said Mr. Murray sleepily.

"Very good exercise, Sir, I can assure you," was the laconic reply.

"Oh, yes, I understand, all your horses were in use; you sent down to fetch Maud;" and Mr. Murray rose, yawned, walked to a side-table, took up his lamp, and, with a general "good night," disappeared.

At last Maud arrived at the solution of some remarks made in her presence at dinner. She looked at Julian, but he seemed quite unconcerned; in truth, he by no means wished to *proffer* an act of kindness, which he felt was due from others rather than himself.

He had not grown from boyhood to man's estate, without becoming very tolerably alive to the pecu-

liarities of Mrs. Murray's disposition. He knew she possessed a temper as well as a will of her own; but why she should take her niece's arrival in such dudgeon, was a mystery he could not altogether solve. Young, pretty, and pleasing, he was disposed to esteem Miss Bingley's presence at Bankside as rather a boon than the reverse; a young lady was just the addition wanted to enliven the family circle, and he could not understand, why her aunt was not proud, and pleased, to welcome a relation, who did her anything but discredit.

As a general rule, Julian's opinions carried great weight at home. With his uncle his influence was unbounded; his nephew was the one person, who, in Mr. Murray's opinion, could do no wrong; while his gay good humour, and agreeable, easy disposition, were in themselves enough to curb the acerbity and acrimony of Mrs. Murray's temper. She liked Julian, and was always on her best behaviour before him, so much so, that Maud was astonished to see her brow smooth, and the hard lines of her face relax, when, as the door closed behind Mr. Murray, Julian pushed an armchair towards the fire, and, in a tone which was neither a command nor an entreaty, suggested to her aunt "that there was no hurry about going to bed yet."

Mrs. Murray was not sorry to be propitiated.
“ If I stay I shall expect to be amused.”

“ Very good,” said Julian, “ while I take a look at this pie, Miss Bingley shall tell us what she thinks of us, as a family.”

Maud was aghast, but he did not give her time to reply. “ We’re not so bad as we seem, there really is some good in us, for those who can see through a millstone.”

Mrs. Murray laughed a little, sharp, ringing laugh; she felt guilty, and was by no means sure that her dutiful nephew might not, under the garb of a witticism, make some unpleasant revelations.

“ Now, Julian, don’t be nonsensical, surely you have not been at Hounslow all day, without hearing something in the shape of news.”

“ It’s the dullest place I ever was at in my life,” was the emphatic rejoinder.

“ Except Bankside,” interposed she.

“ Come!” said Julian, “ don’t give the place a bad character, or you will frighten Miss Bingley away.”

Mrs. Murray did not look as if she thought that an undesirable contingency.

“ I do not think I should ever find the country

dull," said Maud, taking courage from Julian's repeated appeals.

"Wait till you have tried," remarked her aunt, in a dry tone, which effectually put a stop to her taking any further part in the conversation.

Julian did not seem in the least to regard the alternations in Mrs. Murray's manner; he went talking on, and managed so thoroughly to amuse and interest both his companions, that Maud did not remember till she went up to bed, and sat down to think, that this was the cousin Julian, whom she had secretly set down in her own mind as a would-be fine gentleman, and a dashing dragoon.



CHAPTER VII.

"The smallest worm will turn when trodden on,
And doves will peck in safeguard of their brood."

SHAKESPEARE.

JULIAN went away next day, long before the late hour at which breakfast was served at Bankside, and Mrs. Murray, relapsing into her usual indifferent manner, seemed quite to forget that she had an bent, even for a single hour. To do her justice, she held herself above inflicting upon her niece any of those indignities, which usually fall to the lot of poor relations; but it little mattered to Maud, that she lived surrounded by every invention that wealth could procure, or the ingenuity of man devise, while her heart was faint within her for lack of a single kind word, or a responsive token of affection.

Gentle, fond, and impulsive, it was in Maud's nature to have attached herself even to the worldly,

selfish woman, who now stood in the place of the mother she had lost, had not her feelings at the very outset received a chill which froze them at their source.

It so chanced that only one or two days before leaving Torquay, Maud and Herbert had found, put away in a drawer among a mass of old bills and time-worn letters, a sealed packet, addressed to Mrs. Murray. It was in their mother's writing, and the date affixed to the superscription revealed that it had been prepared a very few weeks only before her death. Be that enclosure what it might, Maud could not but look with emotion on the last tremulous characters traced by the feeble hand, since cold in death, while the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed, predisposed her almost to receive as sacred this last memorial of one, who had died and expressed neither wish nor command.

Half, and more than half, of Maud's original aversion to the idea of going to Bankside, might have been traced to the strong prejudice existing in her mind against her aunt, the very natural result of the long estrangement between the sisters. She tried hard to believe that her mother's letter of reconciliation could never have reached its destination; but for all that there was a secret mis-

trust of the fact hid down deep within her heart, which Mrs. Murray's correspondence touching herself had done nothing to lessen. A few faint expressions of regret, and set phrases of condolence comprised all the sorrow she expressed, and it was only Arthur who was charitable enough to suppose that his aunt might possibly feel, under the circumstances, that any wordy professions of remorse might be deemed misplaced and unreal. He dwelt upon the fact that Mrs. Murray had done her best to atone for the past, in offering a home to his sister, and Maud strove hard to believe him.

As regarded this second letter and enclosure, she reared on it a structure of hope, and indulged in fond visions of its softening influences, which were never destined to be realized. She was rather disappointed, when she found that her aunt strenuously avoided all mention of the past. Indeed, truth to tell, Mrs. Murray was determined Maud should never have an opportunity of speaking about her mother. It was a topic she was not disposed to have forced upon her, and as for offering condolence, or descending to sympathy, such a reading of her duty to her neighbour never obtruded itself upon her scheming brain. No wonder then that Maud, at the very outset, met with a difficulty she

never contemplated. She had fancied it the easiest thing in the world to deliver her mother's last bequest to Mrs. Murray, but in reality difficulties sprung up in her path, it had never crossed her mind to anticipate. She could not come down to dinner with it in her hand, nor bring herself to deliver it in Mr. Murray's presence, who had a habit of saying, "Eh! what? what?" whenever he was not individually addressed, and woe be it to the rash individual, who ventured to break through any of the formal arrangements, which regulated every hour of the day at Bankside.

After breakfast, Mrs. Murray usually retired to her boudoir, where, with no more encouragement than she had as yet received, her niece was hardly courageous enough to follow her. In the afternoon they generally drove together; but before Maud ever summoned up resolution enough to come to her point, she would find herself either in Windsor, where her aunt would spend hours in shopping, or driving hastily down to the station to pick up Mr. Murray on his return from London, whose early business habits made him travel almost daily to town, for the sake of dabbling in the funds, or adding a few hundreds to his already handsome income, by some fortunate speculation or lucky hit.

On their return, it was Mrs. Murray's invariable rule to walk round the gardens; but Mr. Murray or the head-gardener were always in her train, and after dinner there was no chance, general conversation, sleep, or an unbroken silence, ordinarily filling up the whole remainder of the evening.

A week passed thus, and at last in despair, having watched Mr. Murray fairly out one morning, Maud screwed up her courage, and knocked at the door of the boudoir.

"Come in!" said a voice within, and Maud entered.

Mrs. Murray was sitting idly before her writing-table, with an expression of weariness and discontent upon her coarse and handsome features, which changed into a look of surprise, at seeing who it was, who had so far presumed.

Maud laid the packet before her without speaking.

"What is it?" said her aunt.

It became a cruel question, thus coldly asked.

In a few brief words, Maud explained. She was very pale, but she commanded herself otherwise so that neither sigh, nor sob, welled up from the depths of her troubled heart.

A visible shadow passed over Mrs. Murray's face.

"This sort of thing is very painful," said she,

with an embarrassed air; "indeed, I could almost wish you had not given it to me."

Such intense worldliness really did not come within the scope of Maud's comprehension.

"I was wrong in not having opened that drawer sooner," said she humbly; "I ought to have done so before I was ill, and then you might have received it weeks ago."

Mrs. Murray did not think it worth her while to explain her meaning. She was so far shamed as to take the packet in her hand, which a sort of superstitious dread of death made her reluctant to touch, still more to open.

"I am sure I quite forgive your poor mother, but it was her own fault that we were not friends."

The colour flushed into Maud's face, hitherto white enough, but she was silent.

"If I had known that she was really dying, I might have come to Torquay last autumn. We were on the move, but I thought——"

She just recollected herself in time before she betrayed her own secret policy, for the idea that her cool, careless way of speaking of the dead wounded the daughter's feelings to the quick, never crossed her mind.

Accordingly, she changed her mode of explanation.

"It cannot be helped now, and I dare say my sister regretted our estrangement quite as much as I do."

Her cold, clear tones did not betray much of the feeling to which she alluded; still Maud would fain have believed it genuine.

"I am sure mamma's mind dwelt on it more than she ever owned to us," returned she softly; "for no subject interested her so much as the recollection of her school-days, before she was ever separated from you, Aunt Sophia."

"There were several years' difference in our ages," remarked Mrs. Murray.

"Yes," said Maud, but her heart was with the letter; she had not come to the time of life when five or six years, less rather than more, is of importance.

Her air of expectation aroused Mrs. Murray's interest. "Do you think there is anything of value in this packet?" said she inquiringly, and breaking the seals as she spoke.

"I do not know, but I am sure there must be a letter if nothing else," was the anxious response.

"Only my grandfather's picture, and one or two old-fashioned trinkets, which I remember as my mother's," ejaculated Mrs. Murray, in a tone of some disappointment.

But Maud's quick eyes had caught sight of some closely-written pages, and she could not reply.

"The rings and trinkets are scarcely worth anything now, though good enough in their day," remarked her aunt, turning them over contemptuously, "but the diamonds round the miniature are fine, if only they are real," and at this happy thought her countenance brightened.

Maud forced herself to speak. "I am afraid not, indeed I know they are only paste."

"How? why; had you your mother's jewels valued? these cannot have paid legacy duty? Did she leave the rest to you?" questioned Mrs. Murray eagerly.

"Mamma parted with her emeralds last year; she had not many diamonds, but all she had were sold to——" she could not finish her sentence.

"I had no idea it was a grievance to you, Maud," said her aunt, with more severity than sympathy, "or I should have said nothing about it, and after all, girls do not require jewels."

There was a choking sensation in Maud's throat, but she would not give way to it; Mrs. Murray had no mercy, though she could not fail to perceive the effort it cost her companion to maintain her composure. She went on.

"If I had only known of it, I would have bought them myself, rather than they should go out of the family; things sold in that way never fetch half their value, and I might have had them for a mere song, I dare say."

Maud was silent; she really did not know how to reply to so cool and calculating a manner of treating a subject, which was anything, but a matter of indifference to her. If she had spoken that which was in her mind, Mrs. Murray would have decidedly been more astonished, than complimented.

"Do you know who has them?" persisted her aunt, regardless of the pain her words were inflicting. "If it were a jeweller, one might secure them yet; and they were very handsome, I know, for I remember them well. Your mother lent them to me for a birthday drawingroom, the very year she came from India."

"I know nothing more than that they were sold," said Maud, at last, the effort to suppress all token of the grief and indignation struggling within her, making her manner short and abrupt.

"It might be worth your while making an effort to remember," recommenced Mrs. Murray, in the sort of tone she might have used had her

niece been a refractory little girl, "for if I were to get them a bargain, and you behaved well, I might possibly leave them to you after my death."

If the matter under discussion had in no wise touched her feelings, Maud might still have been puzzled, in what strain to reply to this kind of argument. She could not speak lightly or jestingly; it was not well to be angry; so, to Mrs. Murray's no small indignation, she remained perfectly silent.

"Did your father's creditors seize them? or what is it, may I ask, that makes you so reluctant to speak?"

This was a taunt Mrs. Murray had not ventured on, had any third person been present. But, as it happened, she was in a bad humour on this particular morning, and it was a sort of satisfaction to her to expend her irritability on Maud, whose quiet and rather depressed manner had, from the first moment she saw her, offended her, inasmuch as she felt it a sort of tacit reproach on her own lack of feeling. If she had been wordily delighted at the change, fluent in praise of Bankside, and charmed with all that belonged to it, Mrs. Murray would have thought it only natural; she did not understand how it was that, passing from

the quiet shadow of her desolate home, Maud was subdued and saddened, by the novelty and glare of the position, in which she found herself.

As to Maud, she was, at last, fairly roused out of the passive state of endurance she had imposed upon herself, as her rising colour and quickened respiration showed.

“ It was by mamma’s wish they were sold, though as for creditors, the tradesmen were far more merciful than mercenary. They offered to wait, but mamma was not happy till every bill was paid to the uttermost farthing.” She spoke with a bitterness which was quite unlike her usual gentle manner.

“ But the emeralds ! who purchased them ? ” persisted Mrs. Murray, determined not to abandon that point of interest.

“ I cannot tell. Arthur gave the order ; Mr. Seagur transacted the business.”

There was a touch of passionate pride in her demeanour, which had its due effect upon her aunt, who took up the long-neglected letter, and began to read in silence.

If Maud had possessed an ace of the worldly wisdom of the selfish being before her, she might have kept the advantage she had gained ; but, with

her impulsive nature, and quick warm heart, she was no match for Mrs. Murray.

The perusal of her letter did not occupy that lady long; she merely glanced her eye over the contents, folded it up, tore it across, and flung it carelessly on the fire which smouldered upon the hearth.

Maud sprang up; and was about, with eager hand, to snatch the scattered fragments from the devouring flames, when she suddenly recollected they were none of hers. Her appealing glance and beseeching gesture had no effect on Mrs. Murray;—a moment more, and it was too late, the last atom of that for which the daughter would have given worlds disappeared, and with a burst of passionate grief and disappointment, she sank back into the chair from which she had so hastily arisen.

Her aunt turned to her as though she had been some strange spectacle, but Maud cared nothing for her supercilious gaze. Her mother's last letter had been burnt before her very face, and that, for the moment, was all she recked of. As it happened, Mrs. Murray was the last person in the world to receive with sympathy the slightest expression of feeling, and, according to her artificial code of manners, and conventional ideas of propriety, an

outbreak such as this, was little short of a social crime.

She waited what she considered a reasonable time, and then spoke.

"May I beg that you will control yourself, Maud; such a scene as this is really too much for me."

This was a form of speech which was very convenient, and perfectly suited to the occasion; but anyone who looked on Mrs. Murray might justly have imagined, that she was possessed of nerves of iron and heart of stone.

"It is useless reasoning with anyone who gives way so entirely," continued she, in an angry tone; "but if you take my advice, you will leave the room before exposing yourself further."

Such counsel had a tone of command, and Maud rose like a chidden child.

"I have only one word more to add," said Mrs. Murray, not sorry to have found an opportunity for giving vent to her smothered dislike; "I have observed, more than once, traces of tears shed for no reason that I can divine; I could see the very day you arrived that you had been crying like a child, and this morning it has been my lot to witness such an outburst as few young ladies, with any self-respect or strength of mind, would have indulged in.

Now I must insist that we have no more tears and lamentations; the thing in the world that most annoys Mr. Murray and myself is a scene, and if you are to live under our roof, the sooner you learn self-command the better. Believe me, you will gain nothing by this mode of conducting yourself."

Maud's eyes flashed, all tearful as they were, and she was struggling to speak, when Mrs. Murray checked her.

"There is no use in discussing the matter. Of course, you think you have a right to do as you please, but, I tell you plainly, I am not of the same opinion. All girls think it interesting to be unhappy, but, for my part, I have no compassion for such morbid despondency, which, after all, if called by its right name, is nothing better than a peevish, discontented temper."

Surprise and indignation had effectually dried Maud's tears; but she was so utterly unprepared for this personal attack, that she could find no words for self-justification, if, indeed, Mrs. Murray had been at all disposed to allow her to speak.

"The real truth is," said that lady—who had now arrived at the culminating point of her peroration—"the real truth is, you have been very much spoiled at home, so spoiled and indulged that

you do not look upon anything in the light of a kindness, unless it comes in the exact shape and form that you desire."

"Many girls," continued she, "would be only too thankful to have any home at all provided for them—to say nothing of the position and advantages which, as my niece, fall to your share—and would readily accord in return all that I expect of you—a cheerful, unselfish, and good-humoured compliance with the tastes and wishes of others."

It is part of the idiosyncrasy of people with Mrs. Murray's temperament, to ascribe to others the faults which are most glaring in themselves. She, moreover, was so well satisfied with her own acuteness in improving this opportunity to the utter discomfiture of Maud, that, for the moment, her complacency almost amounted to sweet temper, when she added:—

"I shall drive at three, and if you are fit to be seen after all this foolish crying, I will take you with me to pay some visits."

Humbled, yet proud, indignant with Mrs. Murray, but still more angry with herself, Maud went upstairs, and locked herself into her own room. Her first thought was to collect her scattered belongings, pack them as best she might, and leave

the house where she was treated with such scant consideration. She would go to Bridget, who was in London, and owe a home to her rather than to a relative, who was an alien from her in all save the name of kindred. Her preparations were soon made; and then, while awaiting the convenient season of the servants' dinner-hour, for effecting her escape unseen, she sat down to write to Arthur. It was a more difficult task than she anticipated; the wrongs that were hard and heavy to bear, looked poor and small, when noted down on paper, and before she had got through more than her first sheet, Maud rose up to reflect. She knew what was right, but it is not always easy to act upon the highest motives. Her whole heart had been bound up in home and home affections, and hard words, and colder looks, were as new as they were painful to her. All was now changed, the whole aspect of her life altered, and the girlish heart, unused to stand alone, quailed at the prospect, which lengthened out before her. Three years! ere Arthur could return, and only three weeks! since they had parted. Three years of this bleak, barren life! How should she ever bear it? She sank down at the foot of the bed, and rested her head on her clasped hands, as she had been

went to do, in other times of despondency and depression, and, from the depths of that sad heart, a cry went up for help. It was not an articulate prayer, but it expressed what she felt—what we have all felt some time or the other—that yearning after the Infinite, that longing after rest, which is the surest proof of our immortality, in that when most dissatisfied with the frail and finite, then do we almost intuitively turn, to the Imperishable and Infinite.

Gradually, under these higher influences, her overstrung feelings softened and subsided. The strife was long, but the principle of submission and self-sacrifice was stronger still, and it was only with an inward, not an outward sigh, that Maud set about the first mechanical step of restoring to her possessions, the trim order she had so lately ruffled. She paused, it was a last struggle, and then the half-finished letter was torn up, and with strong, though self-piercing resolution, she put it out of her power to re-read it. She would not recapitulate her grievances to herself, still less to Arthur, nor trouble his absence with the detail of ills, they were alike powerless to remedy. No! he should hear only of her outward life; smooth and monotonous, aimless, yet easy, and if not happy, yet free from carping care, or corroding anxiety.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The mind's sweetness will have its operation
On the body, clothes, and habitation."

GEORGE HERBERT.

IT was well for Maud that she had more than mere philosophy, something better than an ordinary sweet temper on which to rely, else the ordeal of the next few weeks had, indeed, been unbearable. The scene recorded in the preceding chapter, had done nothing towards propitiating Mrs. Murray in her behalf. Up to that point she had treated her guest with a certain formal civility, which, if cold and chilling in the extreme, was far preferable to the state of things which ensued, when Maud was perpetually made to feel, she was in disgrace. Her music and her singing, the books she read, and the muslin she embroidered, were each and all made the subjects of her aunt's animadversions, and, to give Mrs. Murray her due, nobody could be more disagreeable when she chose. She knew

Maude's tender points, and framed her attacks accordingly.

"By the way, Maud, now those invitations are off my mind," said she, one morning, when her niece had been writing endless notes at her dictation, "I must tell you I have been speaking to Percival about your dress; she will undertake to make anything you require, and if we are to have people in the house, you really must have something new, both for the morning and evening; I am quite tired of that eternal bombazine and crape."

In plain English, Mrs. Murray disliked the very sight of the dismal hue, which reminded her that a sure and certain end must come to life, with all its gaudy vanities. And this was not the first time Maud had been made aware, that her black dress and sorrowful face, were deemed inconsistencies beneath the luxurious roof, whence every sign and symbol of woe or pain, were as carefully excluded, as though their faintest echo would suffice to throw wide the portals, and invite the entrance of those dread allies, sickness, suffering, and death.

There was nothing for it but to acquiesce; and Maud, while expressing her thanks for Percival's proffered aid, in her usual, quiet, courteous tones, was wise enough to pass over the real point at issue,

to wit, the deepness of the mourning, which with her was not merely external.

Mrs. Murray, having made up her mind for an argument, was, truth to tell, somewhat disappointed at meeting with no opposition to her wishes. There was nothing to take hold of, either in words, or manner, so she silently, and in her own mind, set Maud down as ungrateful, because she did not go into rhapsodies at the prospect held out to her.

“Remember, this is not an everyday occasion,” began she, a second time, and rather grandly, after having spent the interval in magnifying to herself her kindness, in delegating such an office to her own maid. “Percival understands the sort of thing; you had better take her advice, she knows perfectly what a well-dressed young lady requires.”

Ascot race-week was at hand; the great event of the year at Bankside, and that for which Mrs. Murray herself lived and dressed prospectively as well as retrospectively. Who should be invited to stay? and how to adapt her guests the one to the other? were vexed questions, which, for the time being, made the interest of her life.

“I shall take you with me to the races every day,” continued she, “and there is to be a public ball at Windsor one night, to which we shall pro-

bably go, at least, if Lady Louis Crichton has no objection ; so be prepared."

Mrs. Murray's manner was too dictatorial to admit of any appeal, and, as for expressing a wish or will of her own, Maud was not allowed to entertain an opinion, even on the subjects, which most nearly concerned herself. Most girls of one-and-twenty, would have felt Mrs. Murray's contemptuous condescension, and perpetual interference, as galling to a degree, and her heavy yoke certainly pressed with tenfold weight on one, who had been accustomed to act not only for herself, but for others. Hitherto Mrs. Murray, for the sake of her own convenience, rather than out of any deference to Maud's feelings, had abstained from taking her niece with her into society, though many were the dull formal dinners, which she and Mr. Murray both received and gave, under the impression they were thereby enjoying the society of their neighbours.

That Maud should feel any reluctance either to change her mourning, or to enter upon gaieties which were quite new to her, was an idea which, if it crossed Mrs. Murray's mind, was scouted as "too ridiculous."

"If she has not spirits for it, she ought to have. It is quite time she should be getting over her

to take the lead at home, her beauty and herself, her pleasures and her pursuits, had all her life been very secondary objects, with those in authority. Indeed, it may be doubted whether Maud had yet attained to the knowledge, which comes quickly enough to most of the sex, of how very pretty and pleasing she was.

She had grown up insensibly into womanhood, surrounded by other and more prominent interests; and it had never occurred to her mother, hardly even to her brothers, that, by slow degrees, she had developed into as fair a type of womanhood, as ever eyes beheld. Mrs. Murray was well aware of it; at least wiser, that is to say, more worldly people than Maud guessed as much, from the extreme care she took not to allow of any opening for an intimacy, between her penniless niece, and the well-endowed Julian, for whom not only she, but his uncle, had very different views.

There were no more evening talks, when the elders were asleep. To use an expressive vulgarism, Mrs. Murray was both literally, and metaphorically, "too wide awake" for that. In her own youth, the attention and admiration of the other sex had been her great object, and, judging Maud, as it may be presumed, by the standard of her

own conduct in times past, she kept watch and ward over her, as if she had been artful and designing, instead of simple, straightforward, and unsophisticated.

An excuse was never lacking at these times, to the guarded woman of the world, for keeping her niece by her side. Maud sang sweetly, but, somehow or other, on the evenings that Julian spent at home, the piano was never opened. It was the same thing when, one morning, Captain Murray offered to teach her billiards, Mrs. Murray directly wanted her in the boudoir; and one wet afternoon, when the young people did sit down to a game of chess, Maud was so fretted by perpetual remarks, advice, and suggestions as to her play, that she lost both her temper and her game, moving so perversely on her own account, rather than follow such unwelcome counsels, that Captain Murray did not think it worth his while, again to vanquish so unworthy an adversary.

Maud liked Julian, not as a well brought up and brought out young lady of twenty-one might have done, because, forsooth, he was a good match, but for the more natural reason that all her life long she had been accustomed to the society of her brothers, so felt quite at ease with him, and had

done so ever since the first five minutes of their acquaintance. He was the only person, perhaps, in all the house—not excluding the servants—of whom she did not stand at all in awe. He was always kind and courteous; he never ignored or seemed unconscious of her presence, and, in general conversation, far from excluding her, as Mrs. Murray was at some pains to do, he would turn to her, and address her, and try, as Maud fancied, to make her feel herself one of the family circle.

Captain Murray was a general favourite, and others of the sex besides Maud, were charmed by a manner which involuntarily softened, and a voice which, ever pleasantly modulated, was yet more low and gentle when he addressed a woman, even if it were only old Betty, who regularly passed twelve hours out of every twenty-four, in weeding the walks, or sweeping up leaves, and who, between the variations of the weather, and of the moods of the head gardener and Mr. Murray, very hardly earned her tenpence per diem.

Well! Betty was no wiser than the rest of us. “Ah! bless him for a fine-looking pleasant-spoken gentleman!” she would say to herself as “the Captain” went by with his cheery “good-day,” and his frank open manner, which won more of the old

crone's heart, than the shillings and half-crowns he would drop into her hand, when the winter's rain was drenching her scanty garments, or the summer's sun beating down so fiercely, that the easy young soldier pitied "the poor old soul out in it, the live-long day."



CHAPTER IX.

" Quiet talk she liketh best,
In a bower of gentle looks,—
Watering flowers, or reading books.

" And her voice, it murmurs lowly,
As a silver stream may run,
Which yet feels, you feel, the sun.

" And her smile, it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our common jestings are."

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.



AUD had been at Bankside more than a month, when, as was his habit, Captain Murray rode over from Hounslow late one afternoon. It was a heavenly day in early June, glowing, serene, and bright, when spring shadows forth the coming summer, that, leaving his horse at the stables, Julian made his way through the shrubbery towards the house. He knew that at this hour, and

in such weather, he was pretty certain to find most of the party at the conservatory, in the flower-garden; and the sight of a well-known dog-cart in the yard, combined with his knowledge of the persons principally concerned, suggested the idea, that the visitor would most probably be found there, playing at billiards with, or, at any rate, in the company of, the lady of the mansion.

He was not far wrong. On turning the corner of the old-fashioned architectural building, which, standing at the far end of the lawn, and away from the house, united the several requirements of orangery, conservatory, and billiard-room, Julian came full upon the trio, whom, as he anticipated, formed the party.

It was just as he expected, exactly what he had known a hundred times before. The chairs and sofas, which converted one part of the building into a summer drawing-room, had donned their gayest chintzes, and in the alcove, where choice flowers shed their sweetest perfume, and long hanging creepers garlanded the roof, stood a miniature Dresden tea equipage.

Mrs. Murray, however, had left her accustomed and luxurious corner; and was exerting herself so far as to walk indolently round the table, mace in

hand, feigning, with a certain coquetry of manner which was somewhat out of date, to know nothing of the game, though Julian could remember an epoch, before grace had been swallowed up in embonpoint, when the lady in question could make strokes, and play with a confidence of success which he, as a boy, had envied many and many a time.

It did not require a necromancer to divine whence had come, the tall, ponderous-looking individual, who was idly chalking the end of his cue, seeing the personage in question, wore the undress uniform of a regiment of the Household Brigade.

Bankside was a pleasant lounge, and within easy reach of the barracks, even in the hottest weather. The dinners were excellent, the claret-cup unexceptionable; the master of the house brought ice and fish from town with him every day, and rarely obtruded his company except in the dining-room; and so long as Mrs. Murray had retained a tolerable share of good looks, and before she grew too exacting, her house had been a very favourite, and frequent resort, with guardsmen of all ages, from subalterns up to commanding officers.

Julian had just time to think, that it was very likely, that his home with its new inmate would

soon acquire more than all its former popularity, when he came suddenly upon the very person who, at the moment, occupied his thoughts.

Maud was sitting on the grassy bank before a side entrance, almost hidden beneath the shadow of an old flowering thorn, and, to judge from her face, did not seem to be particularly enjoying this, one of her first lessons in the ways of the world. At least Julian perceived that, although she was evidently trying to concentrate her attention on the book lying open upon her lap, that the manner and tone of the conversation, of which she could not fail to be an auditor, was anything but pleasing to her unaccustomed ears.

Here was, in truth, one of poor Maud's great annoyances. She had been brought up far removed from all knowledge of those darker passions, and deeper shades of temptation, which force themselves on the senses of those who dwell in cities, and enter into what, by a perversion of phraseology, is called the world; and jokes, witticisms, and innuendoes, which all trenched on doubtful or forbidden themes, were ~~something~~ quite new to her.

Mrs. Murray was to blame in this matter; she would not loose her hold of the world, and its

vanities; she could not forget that once she had been sought after and admired; and still valuing the attention and consideration which, as a beauty, had been her due, she imperceptibly fell into the fatal error of adopting a freedom of speech, and an unreserve in her choice of subjects, which, however much it might amuse, certainly did not raise her very high in the estimation of the other sex.

It had annoyed Julian many and many a time, but never so much as to-day, when he came in for the end of some "good story" of Colonel Kennedy's, before any one but Maud was aware of his presence. Her tell-tale face was quite enough for him, even without the addenda, of Mrs. Murray's sharp ringing laugh. It was distressed and uncertain in its expression, while there was an innocence, and a guileless confidence in her manner of welcoming him, which convinced him, that she was glad of any interruption, or change of society. He had hardly, however, exchanged half-a-dozen words with her, ere Mrs. Murray advanced to greet him.

"Ah, Julian! you are just come in time to take my place," said she.

"Thanks," returned her nephew, somewhat dryly, "I would rather have a cigar and look on. How are you, Kennedy?" added he, advancing about a

couple of steps, and warmly stretching out his hand.

The personage thus addressed was a large, fair, heavy-looking man, who, though the Peerage made him but thirty-five, looked at least ten years older. He was hardly refined enough to have been tolerated in ladies' society, had not the mere accident of birth given him a certain position, of which he had mother-wit enough to take due advantage; and Mrs. Murray, who had her full share of that weakness in favour of rank, which is not uncommon in this civilized community, was not the only person who pronounced him both clever and agreeable, because he could tell an ill-natured story, and repeat a piece of scandal, with a point and piquancy, which left very little to be understood.

Meanwhile, Julian had taken up a position on a garden-chair, near where Maud sat, yet still so close to the entrance, that he could command a good view of the play within. It could hardly be called a *tête-à-tête*, but still the rattle of the balls, the incessant change of place, and the clang of Colonel Kennedy's martial tread, prevented Mrs. Murray's exactly hearing what passed.

Julian began by asking whether Maud disliked the smell of a cigar.

"By no means; Colonel Kennedy has been smoking already."

"Pleasant associations, eh!" said Julian, a little mischievously, as he struck a light.

"My brothers all smoke; Arthur the least; but as for Herbert and Edgeworth, in every difficulty their resource is a cigar." She spoke with perfect good humour, though she quite ignored his allusion to Colonel Kennedy.

"By the way, what is this about your brother? I did not expect to receive a countermand from you of all people in the world."

If she a little evaded his scrutinizing gaze, she answered promptly enough. "I was desired to write; I could not help it."

"And this is the second time he has been put off," soliloquised Julian, in reply.

"Yes," she said, "you asked him before."

"And of course you would like him to come, now, that is to say if it could be managed?" returned he.

"It seems a long time since I saw him," said she simply, and there was a sort of apology in her manner, which struck Julian as symptomatic.

"Well, he shall come next Saturday, or better still, for Ascot-week, if it can be contrived. Only don't make too sure, in case we should be disap-

pointed again," added he, seeing by her face, that she thought his word sufficient.

Maud was not difficult to get on with, when once she began to talk; she was not missish enough to calculate whether she was making an impression, nor shy where she met with no rebuffs, and Julian seemed to find their desultory chat pleasant enough, and he was still sitting astride upon his chair, but with his cigar more out than alight, when a carriage drove up to the house.

"Come in out of sight," cried he to Maud, "and then we may hope the servants may have the wit to say 'Not at home.'"

"It is the Howarths, and I really want to see them. Julian, do take my place," said his aunt, preparing to return to the house.

Captain Murray had no choice but to comply, though at that moment he would have gladly seen Colonel Kennedy, if not at the antipodes, at least transported back to the Clewer Barracks, seeing that he wanted to go on talking to Maud, who had closed her book and was beginning to look, and speak, with more animation than was her wont.

"Very good," was his answer to his aunt, "but you can stay and mark for us?" said he, and he turned towards Maud.

Mrs. Murray, who was gathering up her gloves and shawl, turned sharply round. "Maud will be of no use to you, she knows nothing of the game."

"It's never too late to learn," was the dry response, and Julian looked towards Miss Bingley, who, however, did not venture to take the chair he was placing for her.

Mrs. Murray did not swerve from her purpose. "Come with me, dear," said she, in the soft tone she often made use of, and with a gentle manner which annoyed Maud more even than severity; she so well knew it was assumed. "No, no, on second thoughts, I will not take you, into the house this lovely afternoon; but will you go up to the summer-house in the shrubbery, and tell Goodacre I want to speak to him before the men leave off work?"

She just waited long enough to see her niece set off on her errand, and then sailed across the lawn, her rich silk dress rustling and glancing in the sunlight.

As he took up his cue, Captain Murray involuntarily shook his head.

"Mrs. Murray looks very sharp after made-moiselle," drawled his companion, responding to this gesture, for Julian did not speak, "but I suppose women know each other better than we do."

"I don't believe there is a better little girl in the world than my cousin," rejoined Julian, rather quickly; then recollecting to whom he was speaking, he added, "she has led a very different life from your fashionable London young ladies."

"Oh! you call her a cousin, do you?"

"Strictly speaking, I suppose we are not relations." This was said in the tone of one who did not care to carry on the conversation further.

"Mrs. Murray is quite right according to my ideas," returned Colonel Kennedy, coolly; "for though it would be very pleasant for you to have a pretty girl always at home, and to be at home with, yet it would never do."

"What do you mean?" asked Julian, not but that Colonel Kennedy's manner had been quite sufficient for his information.

"Mean!" repeated the other; "why, that it would be a bad business were you to marry her."

"I don't know in whose fertile brain that idea originated," retorted Julian, somewhat nettled, "but I confess I think it more pleasant than practicable."

Captain Murray was disposed to be angry, though he pretended to turn the suggestion into ridicule. In the first place, he did not see that Colonel

Kennedy had any business to settle what was best for him, and in the next he thought his manner of speaking of Maud highly impertinent. He could have quite found it in his heart to take up his companion pretty sharply; but it is not always easy to resent the impertinences of those with whom we are on terms of intimacy, and, besides, Julian was aware that his aunt was very apt to wax confidential with the particular few; still, though he made excuses for his friend, he would have been well pleased to administer the stroke to his head which sent the balls spinning round the table.

“That’s bad! you have done more for me than for yourself; just hand me the rest.”

Colonel Kennedy was taking aim with such precision, that Julian fancied him at last interested in the game.

Not so, however; the moment he recovered his equilibrium, he proceeded with his cool remarks.

“Yes, certainly Mrs. Murray is quite justified, though it must be a bore for you. Flirtations between cousins play the bore, and, what’s more, those quiet women are always so sentimental. Once get an idea into their pretty heads, and nothing will drive it out again.”

"Very probably," said Julian, with an air, which, despite of himself, showed he was annoyed. "I have not the least doubt your reasoning is quite correct, as far as it goes; but I must just remark, that I have not been in Miss Bingley's presence more than half-a-dozen times, since she has been in the house, and certainly I have not exchanged twice that number of ideas with her."

Colonel Kennedy laughed. "I don't doubt that," said he, "though I did not expect Mrs. Murray to be so quick to act upon my hint."

"What is all this?" asked Julian; "for my part I do not understand what you are driving at."

"It's plain enough. I only wonder you do not see it as clearly as I do."

Julian went quietly on with his play, and Colonel Kennedy followed up his advantage.

"It's all my fault, I believe, for when Miss Bingley's coming was only talked of, I asked Mrs. Murray whether she meant to make a match of it between her niece and yourself. I said it in joke, but I see it was taken as very sober earnest."

He spoke with a certain frankness, which, whether real or assumed, disarmed Julian, for he only said, "More's the pity."

"How so?" asked Colonel Kennedy.

"It has created a prejudice in my aunt's mind against a poor girl, who, as it was, had no very easy cards to play."

"I know Mrs. Murray does not like young ladies in general," remarked Colonel Kennedy, "but I should have thought Miss Bingley's looks would have made all the difference; there is a sort of credit in bringing out a beauty."

"I don't know about that," said Julian, "but I am sure here, that the presence of a nice girl would be everything. All my life long I have wanted a sister, I would give my right hand, as I have often said, for one, and now that anyone would believe we had got the best substitute, that could be found for a daughter of the house, there is all this fuss made, and one is not able to speak to her in peace."

Colonel Kennedy did not at all disturb himself for all this petulance. Between his own good-humour, and a certain assumed frankness, he generally got the best of it.

"I am afraid it is this unlucky suggestion of yours which has done the mischief," continued Julian, more placably.

"It will soon be forgotten," said Colonel Ken-

ned, "but seriously, all things considered, I think Mrs. Murray, with her worldly wisdom, was guilty of a very rash act in giving an invitation, which must throw you and Miss Bingley so much together."

"My good fellow!" cried Julian, "let me once for all disabuse your mind of this delusion. I have not the slightest intention of marrying Miss Bingley, and I don't suppose she would have me if I asked her."

Colonel Kennedy shrugged his shoulders.

"You're a very tolerable *parti*, and I generally observe that these young ladies, who know nothing of the world, are quite aware which side their bread is buttered."

Julian could have knocked him down, with pleasure, but his friend was quite content to have got the talking into his own hands, and on he went.

"Miss Bingley is not overburdened with riches, she has no connections to speak of, and, what is more, she has not the very poor advantages of a home and relations to fall back on. Of course—"

"One and all of which facts are so many arguments in her favour; at least I think so," interrupted Julian, in no pleasant tone.

"I see you are quite prepared to espouse her cause, if not herself," retorted Colonel Kennedy, and he laughed long and loudly at this clever pun. "No, no, Julian, you must do better than a mere Miss Bingley; your wife has been decided on for many years, and, upon my soul, Lady—"

"Yes!" interrupted Julian, scornfully, "the manufacturer's son of course requires a little borrowed consequence to build up his dignity; Mrs. Julian Murray *per se* would be nobody."

"I should just like the head of the house to hear you," laughed the wily Colonel.

"Mrs. Murray, you mean," was the answer; "well, I could not desire anything better than the opportunity of speaking my mind, if only for once, on this very subject," said Julian, and he was more than half in earnest.

"You can have your wish, for here comes the lady, and the fair damsel in her train." There was just the shadow of a sneer in the gallant colonel's tone.

"If I thought it would do any good—" began Julian, "yet no," added he, "I had better leave well alone, as my uncle is apt to say;" he did not finish his sentence, for Mrs. Murray was rolling

down the lawn, she could hardly be said to make progress walking, and he paused to watch her.

"I hate to see any creature put upon, and least of all a woman," concluded he.

"Particularly if she is a pretty one," added Colonel Kennedy, resolved to have the last word.




CHAPTER X.

" My first husband left me young,
And pretty enough, so please you, and rich enough,
To keep my booth in Mayfair with the rest
To happy issues. Let us two be friends.
I'm a mere woman."

AURORA LEIGH.

" I was all ear,
And took in strains that might create a soul."

Comus.

HE French have a saying that " days follow, but do not resemble each other," and certainly the last six weeks of Maud Bingley's life differed sufficiently from the preceding years of her quiet, monotonous existence.

She was gradually becoming inured to the change, learning to make the best of ills she felt were inevitable, and to discover the good which mingles even in the darkest lot; and, what was yet more to be admired, to find a species of happiness, if in

nothing else, in her own naturally sweet desire to please.

Still, with so much to contend against, so many difficulties in her upward path, Maud's spirits were somewhat variable. When she could throw herself into occupation, be it ever so trivial, she could cast aside depression, and rise superior to despondency; for she was young, hopeful, and happy-tempered; yet there were moments of languor, and of sad recurrence to past days, when all her youth and elasticity were not enough to carry her through.

The evening which, at last, brought a large, gay party to Bankside was one of those occasions when her spirits went down altogether. It had been a scorching, sultry summer's day, when the sun's rays seemed rather to burn than to revivify; and Mrs. Murray, who had little compunction when she could make anyone useful to herself, had kept Maud busy the long hours through, arranging bouquets, and selecting flowers, and finally, in the hottest part of the afternoon, sent her down to the village of Old Windsor, with a message respecting the boat, which she wished to be ready, without fail, in case it should be wanted on one of the intermediate days. A servant could have given the order

equally well, and Maud would have been spared the long, hot walk in the burning sun, to say nothing of the headache—a legacy left by her tedious illness in the spring—generally with her the result of any over-exertion, or unpleasant excitement.

As might have been expected, she came back, jaded and worn out, to find the house, usually so tranquil, alive with the bustle of arrivals. Servants were hurrying to and fro, imperials were in the hall, voices and confusion everywhere ; yet, tired as she was, she doubted whether she should not be expected to present herself in the drawing-room : but no, the dressing-bell was ringing, and that being the signal for a general move, she made a hasty retreat to her own room. There, on the bed, lay the result of Percival's industry, tasteful and unique enough in its arrangement, to have given satisfaction to a far more fashionable or fastidious young lady. The sight did not tend to raise Maud's spirits ; the beautiful lace, which almost covered the skirt, had belonged to Mrs. Bingley, and Maud's thoughts flew back to her last birthday, when, in default of her usual costly gift, her mother had bestowed on her the hoards of rich and antique lace, which had long laid useless and unheeded.

Then Bridget had shaken her head over the

black frounces, and called it an "unlucky gift." Maud was not superstitious; but now it was with a swelling heart, and a choking sensation at her throat, which in most women would have brought tears, that she pressed the soft, yielding fabric to her lips, as though, beside the subtle odour of some eastern perfume, there still lingered round it the magic of a vanished touch, the halo of an affection now lost for ever.

It was a very white, pale face which met Julian on the stairs as he came rushing up, so evidently late, that Maud, who was coming slowly down, dressed and ready, stood back to let him pass. He had not seen her since the day whose conversation was recorded in the last chapter, and Colonel Kennedy's suggestions came back to his mind, when he accosted her with "Have you seen Herbert?"

"Is he really come? where is he? can I find him?" asked Maud, her face lighting up with the glad surprise.

"He's quartered in my room, the old school-room that was—I lodge with the gods;" and he was up to the top of the house, three steps at a time, before Maud could say a word more.

She was soon outside of Herbert's door; but her brother was dressing, and she had to wait patiently,

and beguile the time as best she could by looking out of the staircase window.

A gentleman went past her down stairs, a gentleman's gentleman who followed curiously surveyed her, and she began to think about being late for dinner—an unpardonable misdemeanour—before Herbert's door opened.

Maud was almost nervous in her delight at seeing him again, but Herbert, the impressionable creature of the moment, did not altogether reciprocate her pleasure. He had been very happy and very well amused in London, all his late despondency had passed away, and he quite forgot that his sister might still remember and grieve over a past, he had entirely put aside.

Poor Maud! Herbert told her she was looking very well, and very happy,—she had colour enough at the moment,—and supposed she got on better than she expected, as she never complained in any of her letters; and, without waiting or caring for a reply, asked if Lady Louis Crichton were not staying in the house.

Disappointed, but vexed with herself for feeling hurt, Maud answered in the affirmative.

“The prettiest woman I ever saw in my life,” said her brother, enthusiastically.

"Have you met her in London?" asked she eagerly, for Lady Louis was a great person at Bankside.

"She dined one day at old Sir Cuthbert Fielding's in Hanover Square," was the answer. "I almost live there now; I was on his staff when he commanded in Madras, and he does not like to be alone."

The company were defiling from the drawing-room to the dining-room, just as the brother and sister reached the bottom of the stairs.

Mrs. Murray scanned Herbert curiously. There was no doubt about it, he was a very, very handsome man, and the cool, *insouciant* manner, which repelled Maud, impressed her aunt favourably. His sister felt very proud of him, nevertheless, and, with a sort of sense of protection resulting from the bare fact of his presence, she got through the dinner better than could have been anticipated under the circumstances of the dreaded Colonel Kennedy on the one hand, and an utter stranger on the other. The former left her pretty much to her own devices, for which she was truly thankful, as her head still ached; and the latter, on finding she was not likely to originate any conversation, devoted himself to his dinner.

Thus Maud was quite at liberty to give her best attention to Lady Louis Crichton, who sat opposite, with Captain Murray at her side.

Lady Louis was quite a study, even to people who knew the world better than did our heroine. She was young, but had been younger still, and her only real beauty lay in a clear, bright complexion, which was aided and abetted by all that dress and art could do to enhance its charm, for she had not a really good feature in her face. Most women, with varying success and an indifferent amount of perseverance, aim at making the best of their personal attractions, but in this respect Lady Louis surpassed the whole sisterhood. The sole object of her life was to look her best and to be admired. She never relaxed in her endeavours, nor faltered in her determination; in a word, she lent to this one aim all the faculties which others of her sex divide on innumerable and infinitesimal interests and occupations. If she had been plain Mrs. Crichton, with an allowance of thirty pounds a-year, nobody would have looked at her a second time; but she was Lady Louis, and two round 00s added to the above-mentioned figures gave her the power, as well as the will, to set off her charms to the utmost advantage; and so she passed

current as a beauty, except when some contumacious person persisted in saying that she was plain—and younger, better, and softer women remarked that neither years, nor their cares and pleasures, had graven a single line upon the face, which was yet fresh and fair, in virtue of that faultless bloom.

Lady Louis Crichton not only made the best of herself, but of her position, as connected by marriage with the noble house of Crichton. The only daughter of "Old Macmillan," as he was always called, Mr. Murray's former partner in business, and coadjutor in money-making, she was nobody by birth, seeing that her father had not even a barren pedigree to fall back on, and it was not till she left school that it was discovered that Ada Macmillan was an heiress.

Lord Louis Crichton was the lucky individual who found it out. His father, the old Marquis of ———, was the great man, though a very poor one, in that part of Scotland, where Messrs. Murray and Macmillan had both been born and bred. He borrowed money of the firm who worked their way to affluence before his very eyes; his sons followed so admirable an example; and when Lord Louis, who, as second son, inherited the property of Fin-tore—which had come into the family many years

back by a marriage with its heiress—had mortgaged every acre of his heritage, he bethought himself of following the example of his ancestor, and espousing the only child of the man who held the title-deeds.

“Old Macmillan” thought it a great match for his daughter, who was nothing loath to call herself “my lady;” it remained for Mr. Murray to preach prudence. Fintore was valued beyond its intrinsic worth by him, for it had been the home of his forefathers in bygone days. He was but an offshoot from a younger branch, who had grown poorer and poorer since the time, that the daughter and heiress of the head of the family had given herself and her possessions to the Crichtons.

Mr. Murray would have bought Fintore then and there if it had been possible; any one of the Crichtons would have cut off his right hand for money down; but those were the comparatively early days of the prosperity of the firm; he could not withdraw anything like the requisite amount of capital from the business; all he could do was to advise his partner to tie up his daughter’s portion very tightly, and to insist on an adequate settlement in return.

Fintore was all Lord Louis had to call his own,—a

barren heritage under the circumstances, seeing that the one half of the estate had to be sacrificed to satisfy Mr. Murray's claims for money lent, the other to be settled on Ada Macmillan, with no reversion to the Crichtons, unless she bore children to her husband.

Two years of marriage brought no heir; and ere she had passed the rubicon of twenty, Lady Louis Crichton was fatherless and a widow. Mr. Macmillan, who had retired from business, left the whole management of his affairs, as of his daughter's property, to his partner; and Mr. Murray, who had a keen sense of honour, felt himself cut off from purchasing, by the very act which enabled him to improve, the estate to the uttermost. He had taken the house and pleasure-grounds as his share—the least productive part of the property—the land was the principal source of the young widow's income; there was but one contingency—and that had only appeared probable of late years—which would see the whole reunited to Mr. Murray's satisfaction.

Sorrows, that would have crushed most people, came and went, and left Lady Louis Crichton unscathed. Young in heart and hope, she bent her head beneath the blast, the storm passed, and the gay flower upreared its blossom, fuller of life than

before. Certainly she was not of a very reflective disposition, nor was she one whose affections went beyond the limit of her vision. Life, such a life as the lily of the field, was all she cared for,—a luxurious, easy existence, haunted by no stern sense of duties either fulfilled or left undone, made up of pleasure for the present, with hardly an anticipation of anything else for the future, or so much as a natural regret for aught in the past to tarnish the golden woof, which wove the thread of her existence.

Her ladyship's fickle fancy had been taken by Maud the very first moment she saw her. She looked at her with the eye of an artist, that is to say, she could not help thinking how much she might make of herself with her beautiful hair, her clear, earnest eyes, pretty complexion, and lithe, graceful figure. The moment they were seated at table, she asked Captain Murray who his opposite neighbour might be, and had been told in return that she was a Miss Bingley, his aunt's niece; but Julian said no more, and it was not part of Lady Louis Crichton's policy to cry up a possible rival. For the time being she was content to smile on Julian, to play off a thousand feminine wiles, by way of exciting his interest, and engrossing his

attention, while she reserved for the dull interval which must be passed in the drawing-room, any further investigation of the face which, every time she looked at it, seemed to grow in beauty and attraction. It suited Lady Louis's habits exactly, when the ladies at last moved, to enter on a *tête-à-tête* with the young lady in question; it attracted notice; it might be the beginning of a sentimental friendship, and it was less of a bore and restraint, than if she allowed herself to be entertained by the country neighbours, invited to do her honour.

Two beings more diametrically opposite, it was impossible to conceive, or a greater contrast than that between the cultivated, fashionable sort of beauty of the one, and the slight form and delicate features of the other. Lady Louis beguiled her companion into a window fairly out of earshot, and then proceeded to gratify the curiosity of which she, like a good many fine ladies, had her fair share.

"Tell me, why have I never seen you here before?" said she, in her carefully modulated tones.

"It is ten years since I was last at Bankside," was the answer.

"Ten years!" echoed the first speaker; "why, you can hardly remember so far back."

A little gesture of dissent was Maud's sole response.

"And now you are come to have a gay week and enjoy yourself?"

"I am not on a visit; I live here now."

There was an inflection in the voice, that struck even on the careless ear of the woman of the world.

"What a pretty girl! but what a life!" thought Lady Louis to herself, but she only asked if Maud liked the country.

"It bears a very tame aspect in my eyes, after the red sand-stone and rocks of Devonshire."

As it happened, Lady Louis was not thinking of scenery. "Oh! yes, Windsor is too cockney to be picturesque," returned she carelessly; "but do you not prefer London? your brother lives in London."

"If I had the power of choice, there is no saying where I might live," said Maud, with a sort of arch evasion of the direct question.

Lady Louis looked out of the window, and with a sort of half sigh, remarked:—"Ah! we all think that; we have each one a little *if* of our own yet wanting to make us happy."

The habit of talking for effect had so completely become part of her nature, that she could not let so good an opportunity pass, and if ever face expressed sympathy, it was the guileless countenance which was turned full towards her; but before Maud could speak, Lady Louis had descended, from a mere flight of fancy, to common earth.

"You and your brother might be very comfortable together, in a little house in London. Some friends of mine do just the same. I often used to take Miss Lushington out, and should be charmed to *chaperon* you."

"It sounds very pleasant," said Maud, "and I only wish it were half as feasible."

With that aptitude for advising and deciding for their neighbours, which is common to the world in general, and more especially to people who have never known what it is to lack a hundred pounds, still less to be obliged to consider the dirty shillings, Lady Louis proceeded to sketch out her plan.

"It is a very tempting vision," said Maud, at last fairly driven into a corner, "but we are none of us rich enough to aspire to a house and establishment, besides, like the faggot of sticks in the fable, we are all separated and dispersed now."

So many people make a boast of their poverty,

that Lady Louis thought nothing of this confession, which, to own the truth, cost Maud no small effort; besides, she could not have believed that the wearer of the lace flounces, whose value she the while was mentally appraising, was a likely victim of anything like penury, so she only asked whether Maud had any more brothers and sisters.

Speedily enlightened on this head, the next query was:—"But Captain Bingley is your eldest brother?"

Maud thought the interest implied by these successive questions excessively kind on the part of a stranger, but Lady Louis had very good reasons of her own for desiring correct information.

"I suppose he will never return to India now?"

"I am afraid he will be obliged to do so at some future time, but not just at present."

"I do not suppose Sir Cuthbert Fielding would really allow it."

There was a surprised look in the large, soft eyes, which moved slowly and almost grandly round in their orbits, which a little confounded Lady Louis, and she said with a careless laugh:—

"Everybody says, you know, that Captain Bingley will be his heir. I myself know Sir Cuthbert is very fond of your brother, he has spoken to me of

him in such very high terms—" she interrupted herself: "*Parler du soleil, et on en voit les rayons;*" and, true enough, the door opened and Herbert sauntered in.

A look and a smile brought him towards them.

" You see I have been making acquaintance with your sister."

Lady Louis Crichton never uttered the most common-place remark without studying its effect. There were people who wearied of her manner, but for the nonce Maud thought it perfection, and was not surprised to see, that Herbert had neither words nor looks for anyone else.

She herself was quite forgetting there were any other people in the room, when Julian came up.

" I so much want you to sing," began he ; " you know I have never heard you yet." There was a little awkwardness about Christian names, which made him, with all his ease, rather stiff when he first addressed her.

Maud hesitated. The truth was she did not know what Mrs. Murray's pleasure might be.

" Yes, Maud," interrupted Herbert, " don't think about it, or you will be learning to say ' No,' like other young ladies."

Julian's look said, "No fear of that;" but Miss Bingley was not thinking of, or looking at him.

"Come, Maud," urged her brother. "Let it be my old favourite, 'I love her, I trust in her;' it is a man's song, but never mind," and he turned to repeat the words to the siren by his side, but for once Lady Louis was not attending to him; she did not care for poetry; when it suited her purpose, she would assume a certain degree of sentiment, but any real feeling was far beyond the scope of her mind; it interested her just now far more to watch his sister as she crossed the room to where Mrs. Murray sat. There was a slow grace in Maud's way of moving, which caught her fastidious, practised eye; her manner of carrying her head, too, was characteristic, and full of a soft feminine grace, which impressed strangers, and gave them the idea of her being not only taller, but older than she really was.

Lady Louis did not trouble herself to speak, yet both the gentlemen followed the direction of her admiring eyes. They could not hear what was said, but it was curious to mark Mrs. Murray's company smiles fade out, and a very different expression creep over her face.

The result of his observations brought Julian to Maud's side.

"Sing! does anyone wish for music?" was the not too gracious response which met his ear. "It is all very well when we are alone, but to-night—"

Mrs. Murray's manner changed the moment she saw Julian, who on his part said very coolly:—

"I don't suppose there is anyone present who really appreciates good music, but we all, and Lady Louis Crichton in particular, have been begging Miss Bingley to sing."

Maud remained quite unconscious of the implied compliment, which Mrs. Murray was not slow to detect; she knew her nephew's manner well, and fearing lest his next remark might be more pointed, she hastily interrupted him with,—

"By all means, Julian, if you wish it, and Maud does not mind beginning. I said nothing about it for the very reason that I thought, she might dislike so large an audience."

Maud was not naturally shy; but Mrs. Murray's perpetual criticisms had gone far towards making her self-conscious, and she stood both uncertain and undecided.

"You may do just as you please," continued her aunt, "only, if you mean to sing, don't make a fuss about it," and she turned coldly away and resumed the conversation which had been interrupted.

The words were not unkind in themselves, but there was a concealed sting in their utterance which Maud was quick to feel, and she turned so deep a crimson, that for a moment Julian expected a burst of tears. He did not know, nobody could know, how harassing it was to one of her temperament never to be able to do right.

"Well," said he, watching her intently, "is your mind made up?"

The last thing he intended was to be hard upon her. In truth, he was seriously considering what might be the import of those cold, harsh tones. He could see nothing in the occasion which called for severity, and, while pondering on Mrs. Murray's manner, he spoke so gravely, that, for a moment, Maud fancied he, too, was against her.

"I wish, I wish—" began she, and then stopped.

"What is it?" asked Julian, after waiting for her to proceed. "Pray do not sing if you really dislike it," repeated he, and this time there was no coldness in his tone.

In Julian's voice lay no small charm, its deep,

rich, and various modulations always fell pleasantly upon the ear, and now, when his tones were soft and low, and replete with kindliness, Maud was unconsciously won on to speak.

"It is not the singing. I should not care if all the world were listening," cried she, almost passionately; "but I wish I knew what was right—I wish I could ever please—" she was going to say "Mrs. Murray," but she checked herself, and "anybody" was the word substituted.

The moment this speech had passed her lips she would willingly have recalled it, and Julian's earnest eyes, fixed on her with a pitying sort of expression, did not tend to reassure her as to her own discretion.

"I must sing now, I believe it will be best after all," said she, hurriedly; and, without another word, she crossed over to the other end of the room; she did not even wait to hear the response which rose to his lips.

Maud had a simple, straightforward way of speaking, which many people might think commonplace; not so Captain Murray; he was beginning to believe her to be something more than a mere ordinary pretty girl. He had before this fancied he perceived indications of character, which her

reserved, subdued manner could not altogether conceal, and perhaps he was not the less interested in her, that he did not quite understand her.

Maud slowly opened the piano. Mrs. Murray's severity, and her own folly, as she thought it, had quite discomposed her. She could not, as she was wont, throw her whole heart and soul into her music, and any boarding-school miss would have sung the simple ballad Herbert had asked for, with equal feeling and expression. It was not her failing usually. The beauty of Maud's singing did not lay in her voice or execution, though never was a bird's caroling clearer, sweeter, or more trilling; but she enunciated her words, were they English, German, or Italian, as though she were an improvisatore, relating a story, or rehearsing some grand and noble poem; and more, there was a soft, pitiful wail in her tones, the echo, it might be, of her own inner soul, which would wake even Mr. Murray from his after-dinner nap, night after night, and make him sit upright in his chair, listening to old Scotch and English ballads, such as he had heard in days very far back—boyish days, ere he had ever set foot on the broad, sterile highway of busy life, or dreamed of station, riches, gold, or grandeur, and all the glittering dust where-

with the chariot-wheels of Mammon blind the eyes of those who follow in his track.

He never praised her singing, he hardly so much as thanked her; but he would ask for the same songs every evening; and Maud inwardly gloried at the triumph she had won, when she saw the wrinkled brow grow smooth, and the dull, glassy eyes brighten into attention. There was just enough difficulty and doubt about her power to make her always sing her best for her uncle; but somehow to-night, she fancied his rubber had more attractions for Mr. Murray, than all the music in the world; and indeed it was not till just as she was rising from the piano, that he called out from the whist-table:—

“Who was that singing? No, it was not your niece, Mrs. Murray; nothing like her voice.” This to his wife, who had unadvisedly answered his question.

“What was that you sang last night, Maud?” Then in a still louder key:—“You trumped my king, and positively gave them the trick. I beg your pardon, honours do not count this time. Let her answer for herself, Mrs. Murray, I beg.”

It was a sure sign the master of the house held bad cards, or that something was going wrong,

when he contradicted his wife flatly, or addressed her as "Mrs. Murray."

She, for her part, could afford, on these occasions, to be patient, as in all essential points she did exactly what she wished; but the way in which she said to Maud, "Do you not hear your uncle asking you to sing again?" showed, that Mrs. Murray was not particularly pleased, to have the tables turned upon herself.

Julian stood looking over his uncle's hand.

"That poor girl gets but little encouragement; she is frightened, I can hear," said Mr. Murray to his nephew, as he took up his first trick. He never raised his voice or spoke harshly to Julian. "It ought not to be so," and he threw down the knave of trumps emphatically, and looked in his adversary's face—Colonel Kennedy, as it happened—with the calm satisfaction of one who has the game in his own hand.

Julian took the hint and walked off towards the piano. Before he could speak, however, Maud had begun a rich and ever-flowing prelude. Mr. Murray looked up for a minute, his bald head moved for a bar or two in time with the music, but he was far too much interested in his game, to give it a divided attention. For the moment it was an

engrossing interest ; for rich as he was, and gloried in being, he was as well pleased to win six penny points, as to realize hundreds by a lucky speculation. He was worldly and selfish, and enjoyed the reputation, too, of being a bad-tempered, violent man ; but, despite his often angry voice and quick temper, he never said a syllable with intent to wound another's feelings, and Mand was quite sensible, that in his rough way, he meant to be anything but unkind.

“ Excelsior ! Excelsior ! ”

This time the strange words and thrilling sweetness of that wailing voice, gathering power as it rose and fell, stilled in a moment the busy hum of idle voices. A crowd of listeners gathered quickly round ; Julian alone stood at the far end of the piano—marvelling not, as others did, at the flexible voice and powers of execution—but lost in contemplation of the changed expression, which, while adding tenfold beauty to the girlish face, gave yet another phase of character to the singer.

“ Excelsior ! Excelsior ! ”

He attached no meaning to the words repeated ever and again, and yet they rang in his ears and haunted his imagination many a long day after, when time, place, and feelings, all were changed.

Other fair women sang the same song, again and again, in his hearing. Many a bright beauty sought to bewitch Julian Murray for to-day, to-morrow, and perhaps for ever, with her siren voice; but "Excelsior! Excelsior!" ever in his mind, or rather in that inner region, where other influences prevail than those which please the eye and captivate the fancy, remained distinguished from all else, as the embodiment of Maud Bingley, and the first time he heard her sing these words.

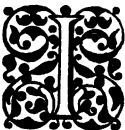
Mrs. Murray came up to the piano. It was generally her pleasure to cavil at Maud's music. She never uttered a word of praise even when she did her best, but to-night, in her secret heart, she was proud of a performance, no one could fail to admire. She did not express her approbation now; she only sat down on the ottoman near the piano and said:—

"Now, Maud, as you have found your voice, you had better sing again."

CHAPTER XI.

"Coquette and coy at once her air,
Both studied, though both seemed neglected,
Artless she seems with artful care,
Affecting to be unaffected."

The Coquette.

T was an animated scene, which met Maud's eye as she stood the following morning in the drawing-room window, which was elevated some three or four feet above the level of the wide sweep. The carriages were assembling; and there, on the lawn beneath, was Lady Louis Crichton, fresh and fair, easy, self-satisfied, and self-possessed, in virtue of knowing that she was looking her very best, by favour of the soft morning air, which suited her bright complexion, to say nothing of the most becoming toilet a busy fancy could devise. She had armed herself with all the little graceful coquetries, she knew so well how to employ, each in their right

time and place ; and it seemed as though the spirit of conquest were already upon her, for she was busily engaged in bandying airy nothings, with a little knot of gentlemen, who had gathered together to watch the proceedings, and discuss the merits of a pair of phaeton horses, whose paces, as a new purchase, Julian Murray was anxious to exhibit. The fiery chesnuts were beautiful to look upon, as they moved now slowly, now quickly, round and round the gravelled ring, and down the carriage-road to the lower gate, champing their bits, arching their proud heads, and flinging flakes of foam in every direction, as they, perforce, accommodated their elastic movements to their master's skilful hand, who seemed to take especial delight in curbing their intemperate energy, and controlling the impatient movements, which showed them eager for a more extended scene of action.

Julian was not so much engrossed, but that he soon caught sight of the one silent, quiet spectator of the scene, and he reined in his prancing steeds beneath the window, to claim the meed of his cousin's admiration. It was readily accorded, and if she did not heed it then, Maud thought many a time after of the open, frank, kindly face, and the

free, fearless movements, instinct with life, and health, and strength.

Mrs. Murray appeared at the hall door; there was a general move, and Julian sprang to the ground, carelessly tossing the reins to his groom.

"Will no one, no lady, I ought to say, honour my phaeton?" He spoke generally, but he looked towards Maud.

Mr. Murray senior was occupying the door-way, in a straw hat, and homely costume, which plainly indicated, he felt himself exonerated from any such gaiety and nonsense, as Ascot, or its races.

"I fancy Ada Crichton has too much regard for her pretty face to risk it behind your fidgety favourites," said he, curtly, and with a rueful glance at the excitable steeds, who, though otherwise quiescent, could not refrain from pawing and raking up the gravel, after a fashion by no means pleasing to the master of those trimly kept grounds.

Julian turned to his cousin; but before he could speak, Mrs. Murray, by an impatient gesture, motioned Maud to take her place in the barouche. Lady Louis was still on the grass, pretending, with prettily feigned alarms, to be unable to pass within six feet of the staid, sober carriage-horses.

"Well," said Julian, "if the phaeton is at a discount, it may as well go back to the stables, unless anyone cares to drive it," and he addressed himself to Herbert Bingley, who was just conveying the fair lady safely, through the multifarious dangers of trampling hoofs.

"Bingley, you were the first man who discovered the merits of these horses; I never should have bought them but for you. Will you undertake to drive Lady Louis in safety?"

Herbert was only too willing; and a quick glance from his dark eyes seemed to have quite as much power, as the more wordy arguments he employed, over and above, in inspiring his fair companion with a wonderful degree of confidence; her nervous tremours were soon forgotten; she graciously permitted Julian to help her mount the high step; and by the time Captain Bingley had taken his place beside her, Lady Louis was full of assurances to Mr. Murray of how lightly she regarded any danger.

The old man looked at her keenly, beneath his grey, shaggy brows, as all smiles she drove past.

"Eh, Julian, cut out?"

"By no means, Sir," returned his nephew, coolly; "I'm not entered for the stakes;" and he stepped quietly into the barouche.

"Nothing could have been worse managed," began Mrs. Murray, petulantly, an angry flush suffusing her face. She checked herself, for Sir George Vanston came hurrying through the hall, and presented himself at the carriage door.

"Mrs. Murray, will you be charitable? Grey and Kennedy were in such a hurry to be off, that they have left me behind."

The lady addressed desired nothing better, or, at any rate, Sir George's presence was preferable to a drive in company with her nephew and niece only, and, with a parting injunction from her lord and master, "Not to be late, or to keep dinner waiting," the horses' heads were turned towards Ascot heath.

Maud did not anticipate a very pleasant drive; she saw, by her countenance, that Mrs. Murray was in no placable humour; something had gone wrong, for she complained of the heat, the dust, and the sun; and did not respond graciously to anything that was said. Happily for Miss Bingley, the presence of the gentlemen was a security against any outward expression of ill-humour, which would else have been surely vented upon her; though Mrs. Murray was what her maid called "put out;"

for no better reason than that she was not satisfied with her own appearance, or array. Like Lady Louis Crichton, she made rather a study of her dress, or, at all events, talked a good deal about it; but, every now and then, she made a grievous mistake; and, albeit it came from Paris, no French-woman of her age would have worn the little, fashionable, white crape bonnet, which, placed at the back of her head, did nothing to soften a complexion, which, in her youth, had often been likened to lilies and roses; but where the roses had, alas! long usurped the principal place.

No one would have suspected Mrs. Murray of being still in mourning; but her dress, of the palest peach colour, was meant to pass as such, and, with all its furbelows and flounces, seemed far too radiant and rustling for a sultry summer's day; it would have been in excellent taste, had its wearer been still slight, small, or graceful; but years had passed over Mrs. Murray's head, and left their trace on face and figure, and she was really far too fat and florid, to venture with safety on so trying and juvenile an extreme of fashion, particularly in the presence of two women, one of whom as entirely outshone her in the matter of a most *recherché* toilet, as did the other in the careless

grace, which borrowed nothing from the extraneous advantages of dress. It did not mend the matter either, to find Julian determined, the whole way, to keep up a conversation with his opposite neighbour, any more than it pleased her to see Sir George Vanston's eyes wandering in the same direction, and again and again returning to the pretty, placid face, which was fast lighting up with the novelty and animation of the scene. The jostling equipages, the concourse of human beings of every rank and degree on the course, the blaze of beauty and of brightness in the Stand, are a spectacle—could it be divested of the snares and passions lurking unseen beneath—which has its effect even on those who dwell amid the bustle of thronging life and busy action; how much more on one whose experience had been bounded to the narrow limits of a sick room, within whose walls the jar and din of the world had never waked a responsive echo!

Maud had rather dreaded this day. Ascot races, and their attendant gaieties, had been all very well viewed prospectively, and in the distance; but when it came to the point, she would infinitely have preferred staying quietly at home. A hint to that effect, which she ventured to give, was not well received either by Mrs. Murray, or

Herbert ; so here she was, and a more guileless, unworldly heart never beat, than that which followed Lady Louis Crichton up the stairs into the Grand Stand.

Lady Louis was not the best person to take charge of a girl thoroughly unversed in the ways of the world ; she was good-natured enough, but discretion was, certainly, not one of her virtues. The world talked, and not without reason, of her multifarious flirtations ; she meant no harm, and, doubtless, was guiltless of anything worse than extreme folly and imprudence ; but, what first began in idle vanity, had, in process of time, degenerated into a restless craving for excitement, whose result was a certain levity of conduct, which no right-thinking person could fail to condemn ; and this was the woman to whose chaperonage Mrs. Murray, in her worldly egotism, was content to transfer her niece. She always felt Maud's quiet, silent manner, as a sort of restraint upon herself, and was only too glad to be rid of her, when Lady Louis, tired of her seat upon the grass-plat, volunteered to take Miss Bingley with her into the Stand.

When he urged her going to Bankside, Arthur little dreamed of the perils to which his sister was

to be exposed. He knew that, in her new home, she would go into the world, and enter upon a phase of existence, to which she had hitherto been a stranger. But yet he did not shrink. "In the world, but not of it," was no new vocation to the earnest and devout in heart. In the entire simplicity and depth of his own religious convictions, he believed that it was not in this pleasure, nor in that amusement, especial danger lurked; but rather in the spirit which would take frivolities and excitements, as the end and aim, not as the natural effervescence of animal existence.

He did not fear. Maud's mind was young and healthy, and, if empty of experience, full of fire and faith. Principle, too, was with her, a thing not of profession, but of feeling, and it was well for her that she possessed it; for now, in the absence of all outward and visible supports—all fond cares and kindred love—it was to be the sole stay, the sure anchor of one young and untaught, suddenly launched, without a word of warning, into the midst of a life, not devoid, indeed, of attraction, but whose pleasures and graces, to say the least of them, were all superficial.

Lady Louis Crichton was not a person to pass by unheeded, and Maud came in for some share of the

notice her gay companion excited. Those who looked once at that fair, young face, were likely to accord it more than a second glance, and Julian noticed, if no one else did, how many admiring eyes were turned upon the girlish beauty, who stood so calmly by her side.

Maud was very simply dressed ; but her black silk gown, with its deep flounces, and a lace mantle of the same dark hue, which hung around her in rich, soft folds, set off her pretty little rounded figure to the best advantage ; and though her bonnet, as black also, came under Mrs. Murray's heavier condemnation, it was of the best material and shape, and well became her rich complexion and the oval outline of her face, while the sombre character of the whole had the advantage of being a sort of distinction among the gay crowd, by whom she was surrounded.

With twice, ay, and twenty times the wit and intellect of her new friend, Maud found herself quite at a loss, when Lady Louis presented to her one after another of her acquaintance, pouring into her ear the while, a running sort of commentary on their characters, position, and possessions.

Ada Crichton had the habit of society ; she was a thorough woman of the world, and knew exactly

how and when to speak on all the slender topics of the day. It was mere froth, but so well concealed the shallow depths below, that Maud actually envied her fluent ease, and gave her credit for a superiority she thought it almost vain to emulate. Her own quiet, self-possessed manner stood her in good stead. No one discovered that it was an effort to her to talk, or suspected how depressed and desolate these gay people, with their lively manners, and unceasing rattle made her feel. She never guessed she was admired; but in her very tranquillity there was a species of repose, which made some of those most *blasé*, hackneyed votaries of excitement find in her a most agreeable contrast.

Herbert did not trouble himself much about his sister; he was so entirely engrossed by one object, that he hardly gave her a thought; and when Lady Louis and her gay train swept off to luncheon, he forgot all about her, and left it to Julian to take Maud under his protection. By comparison with all these strangers, Maud felt quite intimate with him, and a very pretty, bright smile was his reward for seeking her out.

As they went down stairs, Captain Murray rallied her, on what he called her success.

"I came up an hour ago to see if you would

like to move down to the lawn, and there was such 'a crowd of gazing' people in the corner where you and Lady Louis had taken up a position that there was no getting in a word."

"I saw you, but I did not think you looked as if you cared to speak," said she, simply.

"I had no chance, you were so surrounded."

"I really think Lady Louis knows everybody," remarked she.

"Everybody who is anybody."

Julian had a dry way of speaking, which Maud did not always understand, but to-day she was quite courageous.

"I think she is the prettiest person I ever saw," she began, enthusiastically.

"Pretty!" said Julian, with emphasis; "yes, pretty, if you will; but Lady Louis Crichton is not the prettiest person I ever saw."

Captain Murray waited for an answer, little thinking he had quite contrived to silence his companion. So soon as he perceived this, his manner changed.

"She has hardly a good feature in her face," he went on; "but she is pretty, certainly, though I have an idea that your brother would think that but faint praise."

"Herbert admires Lady Louis very much, I think," said Maud, with a little tinge of formality in her tone.

"I never saw a fellow more in love in my life, and I'm sorry for it," said Julian.

Maud was not accustomed to hear such subjects discussed, and Captain Murray detected directly that it was so.

"I dare say you think me a cool hand," he remarked; "but you must remember I have known Ada Crichton all my life, and I do not look upon Herbert as a stranger."

Maud was mollified immediately.

"Then why should you be sorry?" she asked.

"Because I fancy your brother's heart is in it, which is more than can be said for Lady Louis Crichton."

"I did not think she discouraged him last night," pleaded Maud, "and to-day she has certainly talked to Herbert more than to anyone else."

Julian shook his head.

"It is very difficult to understand what any woman means," was Captain Murray's not too courteous soliloquy.

Maud fired up in defence of her sex. "That is like one of Colonel Kennedy's opinions. I should

be sorry to think as badly of the rest of the world as he does."

"Most men form their judgments on their own experience, and I suppose Kennedy has little reason to speak well of his fellow-creatures; but, pray don't class me with him." In the eagerness of his self-defence, Julian almost forgot the point from which he started, but Maud was not content to allow the conversation to descend to generalities.

"Lady Louis must see Herbert is very much in earnest," she persisted, though in reality she was beginning to catch the contagion of doubt.

"Ada Crichton is used to the sort of thing," said her companion, coolly. "She takes it quite as a matter of course, that a handsome fellow like Herbert should fall in love with her."

Maud looked distressed.

Julian waited till they had disengaged themselves from the crowd at the wicket-gate, and were following the rest of the party down the course before he said:—

"And, to tell you the truth, there was a time in my life when I would have cut off my right hand to please the fair widow. I was a mere boy, and, in process of time, I grew out of my infatuation."

"Herbert is older than you are," said Maud, gravely.

"Yes," retorted Julian; "Herbert must be thirty by this time, an age when most men begin to think seriously about marrying."

"He evidently does," was the answer.

"And, like many another man, is egged on by thinking he has rivals as much in earnest as himself," said Julian, soliloquising, rather than addressing his companion.

"And surely he is right? Many people admire Lady Louis very much," persisted Maud.

"Admire!" repeated Julian; "I think in his case you use that word in a wrong sense."

"I do not know," and Maud spoke doubtfully. "I have certainly heard more about the sort of thing since I came to Bankside than I ever did before; Colonel Kennedy is always talking of his admiration for this person or that." A world of quiet scorn embellished this last allusion.

"Well!" said Julian, "and it is very much of the sort I mean. A man—we will not say your brother, for I really think he loves her for herself—a man admires Lady Louis, he pays her a good deal of attention, flatters, compliments, follows her,

and she permits it. But he does not mean anything by it."

"All I can say is, then, I should not call that man a gentleman," and an indignant colour mounted to Maud's face as she spoke.

"It is the way of the world;" and Julian, far from being offended, was rather pleased to think he had roused his little companion's spirit.

"But is that being honest and straightforward? Oh! Captain Murray, you, who are a soldier, cannot think it right."

She spoke with a very soft emphasis, despite her eagerness.

"Why," said Julian, frankly, "I can't say I ever troubled myself to consider whether a little flirtation were right or wrong. I only know I should think twice before I made a woman my wife, who always had half-a-dozen admirers hanging about."

"You feel so strongly on that point, and yet you do not think it any harm to rank as one of the half-dozen. Captain Murray, I begin to think you are very inconsistent."

"Don't say Captain Murray. You shall scold me as much as you please, if you will not do it so formally. Julian is not a bad name after all."

Maud laughed, but she was a little disconcerted.

"To go back to our argument," resumed Julian; "what you think so inconsistent is done every day."

"That does not mend the matter," objected she.

"But," persisted Julian, with a certain droll assumption of candour, "not even Lady Louis herself could expect all the dangles in her train to be thinking of marriage. She receives their attentions, but she would be very much bored if one and all of these men were to insist on proposing to her."

"I was in hopes we were talking generally, not of Lady Louis in particular," was Maud's answer. "It really is not fair to be so personal."

"You have no such scruples about an unfortunate individual yecept Julian Murray. You don't care how much you blame him."

The speaker assumed such an air of injured innocence that Maud laughed outright.

"I do not quarrel with you, only with the opinion you advocate."

"And seriously," said Julian, "I am no worse than my neighbours."

Maud looked grave. She did not immediately

reply, and something in her face, combined with this expressive silence, made Julian say:—"I believe you think, that to be no better than the rest of the world, is to be in a very sorry plight."

"I know how difficult it is to act up to a high standard," began Maud.

"Now don't think me very bad," interposed Julian, "but, to confess the truth, I am afraid I am content to go on with the stream."

"No, no," said Maud, gently, "do not be too severe upon yourself. You have aspirations, you would wish—"

"I should wish to marry a woman I could respect," said he, quickly, "and I plead guilty to having my own views in this particular. Now I will tell you," and he turned to Maud with an earnestness hitherto foreign to his manner, and which Colonel Kennedy, who joined them at the moment, did not fail to mark.

"Is Lady Louis going to walk up and down the course all day?" asked he. "Mrs. Murray has sent me to say she is waiting luncheon."

Julian and Maud had been so interested in their conversation, that they had followed blindly in the track of their party, while Lady Louis's restless spirit had led them past the Royal Stand, and up

and down the ranks of carriages, in search of some possible acquaintance.

Colonel Kennedy began to talk of a very clever gipsy, whom he said had been telling the fortunes of some of the party, and then, and not till then, did Lady Louis bethink herself of going to the carriage.

"Before next Ascot," said he, "I am to possess as many thousands a-year, as I have now sovereigns in my pocket. A round dozen, by Jove!" and he held out a handful. "She would not have it that bank-notes count. I was for going the whole hog; as it is I've booked it, and by the way, I am to have a very pretty wife into the bargain, to complete my luck, by the time two years are over. What do you think of that, Miss Bingley?" added he, as he handed her into the barouche they had just reached.

If there was a person in the world Maud disliked, it was Colonel Kennedy. He took very little notice of her when at home; but to-day, because there were a good many people present, he rather pretended to treat her as though they were on terms of intimacy.

He brought up the "good prophetess," as he profanely called her, and bade her tell the young

lady's fortune. At the bottom of his heart he fully believed every word of these predictions, and fancied other people must be equally superstitious.

It was not often that Maud rebelled, but on this point she stood firm. Colonel Kennedy insisted; Mrs. Murray resorted to the still more potent weapon of ridicule, while the handsome gipsy-mother, with her embrowned complexion, and keen, piercing eyes, stood looking the object of their attacks through and through. In the practice of their vocation, these singular people acquire no ordinary amount of penetration, and she, like others, was attracted by the sweet face, nor was it hard to tell the tale, those soft, wistful eyes revealed.

"Do not fear, pretty lady. They will none of them be able to harm you in the end," began the woman, as she looked tauntingly round. "Hold ye firm, you've gone through sore troubles, and may be there's some dark clouds lowering—"

"Come! come!" interrupted Colonel Kennedy; "you don't call that fortune-telling."

The woman changed her tone instantly; and when she spoke next she had fallen into the ordinary platitudes of her tribe.

"Cross your hand with silver, my lady fair, and

"I'll tell you who your true love is." She was looking keenly the while at every face within her ken.

"Take your glove off, Maud, and don't be so absurd," said Mrs. Murray; but Maud only shrank further back into the corner of the carriage.

"I would rather not. I do not wish to have my fortune told," was her repeated answer.

Colonel Kennedy was not easily rebuffed; encouraged by Mrs. Murray, and bent on carrying his point, he unscrupulously took hold of Maud's hand, and was going to unbutton her glove.

"You forget yourself, Colonel Kennedy," said Maud, quite calmly, though the thick blushes burnt into her very eyes.

Her clear, cold, quiet tones, not only made him loosen his grasp, but caused Julian to look up from the hamper he was assisting to open.

Colonel Kennedy tried to laugh off his awkwardness, but, in his secret heart, he was not a little piqued and offended, by the haughty disapproval her form of expression, and manner of speaking evinced.

Up to this point, Julian had appeared more engrossed by the preparations for luncheon, than interested in what was passing, and Maud was

almost surprised just at this juncture, to see him press forward, and hold out his hand. Somehow, she was a little disappointed; she thought he, at all events, would have held himself above such folly, to call it nothing worse. The tempting bait of a five-shilling piece, which Captain Murray stood jingling up and down, drew the woman off from Maud. She dropped his hand the moment she took it.

“ You’ll not thank me if I go on.”

“ Nonsense!” said he; “ you don’t suppose I’m afraid; I’m not quite so superstitious as all that.”

The dark blood mounted to the gipsy’s handsome face. Like many another sibyl, she had implicit faith in her own predictions, and it angered her to have contempt cast upon her skill.

“ So you think to carry it all your own way, because, forsooth, you were born with a silver-spoon in your mouth,” said she, scoffingly. “ But I tell ye, riches won’t help where you’re going, and if ever ye come to happiness, it must be through seas and seas of blood—knee-deep will it be ere ever you win a bride, or approach the altar.”

With her threats, she had well-nigh silenced all

that gay and thoughtless company. Even Mrs. Murray shivered.

"Pray send the woman away!" she cried. "It does not do at all," added she, in a whisper to Colonel Kennedy.

Only Maud looked up, and Julian caught her simple, straight, unabashed look directed full towards himself. There was no credulity, not a trace of surprise or dread, on the beautiful countenance. It rather demanded his pity for the poor deluded creature, thus arrogantly assuming powers never yet bestowed by Him who "chargeth even His angels with folly." Her invocations of good, and imprecations of evil, alike fell harmless on ears attuned to far higher strains.

Ada Crichton was the first to rally. Fanciful to an extreme, she would fain learn something of a destiny, which, in a worldly sense, at this moment certainly rested in her own hands. And having avenged her injured dignity, the gipsy was nothing loath to leave a more favourable impression. Colonel Kennedy bade her "not be a fool," and it did not seem as if this time her clue was lacking.

Lady Louis's well-kept jewelled hand glistened in the sunshine, and, with her eye fixed on one

golden symbol of love, the gipsy told of fresh ties and other joys. She did it well. It was the lady, not the poor outcast, who over-acted her part, for, with downcast eye, and furtive glances beneath her drooped lids, Lady Louis listened to the hackneyed tale, and feigned to think it true.

Julian was leaning over the carriage door, next to where Maud sat.

"Kennedy put her up to it," whispered he; "I am very sure."

Maud was watching Herbert's uneasy, handsome face.

"Is it only sport to her?" asked she, in the same tone, but speaking with marked emphasis.


"Never mind the rest of the proverb," was Julian's answer. "He will get over it in time; the worst of it is, these sort of affairs rob the tender passion of all its sweet romance."



CHAPTER XII.

"Calamity is man's true touchstone."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

ONG, long after was Maud destined to remember all the most trifling incidents of that day. She had hardly thought or cared about them, as the hours passed one by one, but the time was at hand when they were to be associated with what she valued above all price, when she would have given worlds, as the phrase goes, to call back the mental peace, she had too little prized, while it was in her possession.

There was more difficulty in arranging the programme of the return of the Bankside party, than there had been for the starting in the morning. Lady Louis Crichton was tired, and, to own the truth, a little bored by Herbert's unremitting devotion, and, scouting his suggestion of the phaeton, she chose to go in the barouche.

Sir George Vanston and Mr. Grey both wanted

to be conveyed back to Bankside, as did Colonel Kennedy, the hired vehicle of the morning having unaccountably disappeared, or rather accountably yielded to the silvery solicitations of another fare. Mrs. Murray had not seen much of this last-named gentleman all day; he had been too deeply engrossed in the, to him, real business of the races, to pay much attention to anything beyond the champagne and raised pie, for which Bankside was famous. He had not been in attendance, save at luncheon-time, and, thinking herself neglected, Mrs. Murray was feeling very discontented, and was not in the most placable of humours. Having closed his book, for the nonce, and made his money, Colonel Kennedy possibly felt it incumbent on him to descend to some of the amenities of society, and Maud always thought he was the person who proposed driving Mrs. Murray back in the phaeton.

Julian did his best to dissuade his aunt from this new freak:—"I know you are apt to be nervous in a carriage," said he; "I am afraid these horses may not be very steady, if there's anything like a crowd, and we are too late to get off the course quietly."

"Oh! I shall rather like the excitement," returned Mrs. Murray.

"You're not afraid of trusting yourself to my guidance," put in Colonel Kennedy, who was already seated, reins in hand.

The step was high, and Mrs. Murray was not very agile, but, though half frightened when she found herself behind the fiery chesnuts, she preferred remaining where she was, to the perils of a descent.

"You've not changed your mind, Murray; you would not prefer driving them yourself?" asked the charioteer, seeing something like dissatisfaction on Julian's tell-tale face.

"By no means. I wished you to drive them; all I want, is to see how they go, so I shall get up behind. I'm not altogether satisfied with my bargain."

The barouche moved off the first, but before they had reached the corner, where the roads diverge, the phaeton had passed them. Julian was standing up behind, and talking over the hood.

"Look at Mrs. Murray's face, I know she is dreadfully alarmed," laughed Lady Louis. "I behaved far better in the morning, did I not, Captain Bingley?"

Herbert, who was sitting gloomily in the further corner, and with Mr. Grey, as bodkin between him-

self and Sir George Vanston in the back seat, revived a little beneath the smile which accompanied these words.

Maud could not help looking anxiously after the phaeton. It was soon out of sight, for Colonel Kennedy had taken possession of the side of the road, and was rapidly passing the long line of vehicles; but she noticed that, after they had turned down the hill and were beyond her ken, that the people on the top of a coach were standing up, and watching their progress with an unusual sort of interest.

She did not know exactly what she was afraid of, but a painful kind of dread engrossed her mind, and she was quite glad when Lady Louis said:—"Now I am not going to speak a word more, or I shall be too tired to come down this evening;" for she could then give herself over to watching for the phaeton.

When they turned out of Windsor Park at the Englefield Green Gate, their friends were just in front of them.

"Settled to their work at last," was Mr. Grey's laconic remark; but the horses were all in a foam. The phaeton was going slowly, and the coachman essayed to pass.

"Keep back!" cried Julian; "we are going on in a minute; don't come too close."

It was rather more than a mile from home, and, in obedience to these injunctions, they kept so far behind, that, coming down the road, the phaeton was to be seen across the paddock, just driving up the approach to the house.

Maud breathed a sigh of relief.

The barouche had to pass through two gates, skirt the shrubbery, then out upon the lawn. They were passing beneath the old elm tree which stood at the corner, when an exclamation, which burst from the lips of both the servants on the box, caused every head to turn.

Maud hid her face, the phaeton was careering madly across the smooth-shaven lawn. Julian was still in it; for a moment he seemed as though making an effort to seize the reins from the back; the next he was flung from his place, but he did not fall clear.

"Good God! he must be killed!" exclaimed a man's voice. There was an agony of horror in the very tones.

How they got out, who carried Lady Louis into the house, who had fainted away, Maud never knew. The next thing she saw was the phaeton jammed

between two trees. One horse had leaped the iron fence, and broken free from all restraint; the other sank on the earth with a dying yell of agony, which rung in Maud's ears many and many a time after, when sleep had robbed her of the power of putting away her thought.

Julian lay on the gravelled road. He neither spoke nor moved. A groan, even of the utmost anguish, would have been better than this awful silence.

Servants rushed from the house, from the stables, from every side.

Colonel Kennedy's ruddy face was white, even to the lips, and his voice was hardly louder than a whisper as he said:—"Go in, you can do no good here."

Maud obeyed. Her limbs trembled, her head swam; it was more like an awful dream, an oppressive nightmare, than a living reality.

Peal upon peal of laughter rung forth, from the open windows of the drawing-room. Merriment in those tones there was none, but they never ceased, or ceased only to be alternated, by fearful cries and heartrending screams.

Mr. Murray was walking rapidly round and round the narrow limits of the hall, wringing his

hands, and ever and anon raising his withered, stricken face, and clasped palms towards Heaven.

"My poor boy! Oh God! Great God! spare him! Julian, Julian, and I did it, I told him—"

His voice was lost for the moment, only to rise and fall once more in an agony of supplication, as he repeated, "God, great God, spare him!"

It might have been the first heartfelt prayer, which had ever crossed those firm, hard lips.

When he turned and confronted Maud in the doorway, he glared at her like a savage beast.

"Go, go! don't you hear her? stop that noise. Tell that woman to be quiet."

It was indeed time some one should exert their presence of mind, and common-sense, for when Maud entered, Mrs. Murray lay on the floor of the drawing-room, tossing from side to side in violent hysterics. A crowd of female servants surrounded her, but no one dared either to move or touch her. Her cries and screams were so awful, that for a moment Maud feared the very worst.

She laid her hand on Percival's arm. "Where—how?" It was all she could say.

"My mistress was standing on the steps. Neither carriage nor horses touched her. It was only poor Mr. Julian," and the woman's tears flowed fast.

Every tongue was loosened. The story was soon told. "Mrs. Murray and Colonel Kennedy had alighted. Julian was searching for his aunt's parasol in the head of the carriage. Captain Murray had not got the reins; Jem stood at the horses' heads. Some one spoke to Jem, and he moved in obedience." Maud knew the rest.

She had knelt down, and was unfastening her aunt's bonnet, and was trying to loosen her dress. Mrs. Murray was apparently conscious to a certain extent, for the very sound of voices round her increased her violence, and it required all the united strength of the sturdier portion of the women round, to keep her from doing herself some injury in her struggles.

A heavy measured tramp was heard beneath the windows, as of men carrying a burden. Mrs. Murray recognized it, for she held her breath, and no sound, save a low gasping murmur, passed her lips. They paused in the hall, in evident consultation.

Lady Louis had hitherto been lying quite white and motionless, but perfectly conscious, on the sofa. Now she sprang to her feet. "They are not going to bring the body in here?" she said.

No one answered her. Maud ventured on a

reproving look ; words would have availed little, for the room once more resounded, with the cries and screams of the unhappy woman, who neither could, nor would, put any restraint on feelings, which had been shocked and horrified beyond control.

Under the influence of Maud's example, who, though white and trembling, never quailed even from the blows, which, in her struggles, Mrs. Murray dealt forth unconsciously, the feminine part of the establishment tried every known remedy for hysterics, but with ever-varying success. How long those minutes seemed ! Her own maid had persuaded Lady Louis to withdraw, and, as she left the room, Maud whispered a request that she should bring her tidings from above. Her keen senses had warned her, that they had carried the real sufferer through the dining-room, up the stair-case beyond, to his own room.

At last some one knocked at the door. Maud opened it just far enough to see who it was ; she would not disclose to any eyes, even to those which had a right to judge, the spectacle of Mrs. Murray, flushed and violent, her hair disordered, her dress disarranged.

It was not her uncle, as she expected, but Herbert.

"The medical man has arrived," said he. Her lips framed the question she dared not ask.

"He is alive," was the grave response.

At length, when Maud was almost in despair, Mrs. Murray's struggles ceased. She did not weep, or shed a single tear, but low moans and sobs had succeeded to more clamorous evidences of grief. They took advantage of this quasi-tranquillity to carry her up-stairs, and, by Maud's directions, placed her in bed.

She was kneeling before the medicine-chest, compounding a composing draught, when Mr. White, the doctor, entered the room.

"They tell me I am wanted," said he, in a low voice.

He looked at his patient, felt her pulse, and then crossed over to Maud, who had suspended her operations on seeing him.

He asked what she was about.

She tried to speak, but her voice failed her. She had been used to command herself, and accustomed to emergencies, and her ready finger pointed to the page of useful remedies, whence she had derived her knowledge.

"Mrs. Murray does not require it," remarked he, taking the glass out of her hand, but steadily

continuing the task. "She will do well now, and sleep off the attack. There is no cause for anxiety here," he added, answering to her look.

The mixture was ready, he offered it to her.

"I do not want it," said Maud. "I am quite well."

Mr. White did not argue the point, but he pressed the glass upon her, beginning the while to tell her of some Countess or Marchioness, who had been at the Castle last year, and who had been in hysterics, or else had been with some one in hysterics, Maud never knew which, but, any way, Mr. White had given advice upon the occasion.

He took another look at Mrs. Murray. She had sunk into a disturbed kind of heavy sleep. Mr. White desired Percival not to leave the room, and turned again to Miss Bingley.

"You are not wanted here, you may rest quite satisfied. To-morrow, Mrs. Murray will be as well as ever." He made a kind of gesture, as though he wished her to leave the room.

"You have been used to illness, I should imagine," continued he, as he gently closed the door behind him.

Maud assented.

Mr. White looked at her black dress, and he

remembered seeing her one day in Windsor, in very deep mourning, and had a professional desire to ask for whom it was worn; for, though he was a very clever man, he had lived all his life in a provincial town, where he had imbibed a keen relish for any sort of gossip, whether it concerned people he was interested in or not. But Maud did not seem disposed to be communicative; so he proceeded with his category, thinking, the while, he could ask all about this another day.

“And you have seen leeches applied? and, perhaps, blisters?” proceeded he, inquiringly.

A very few words satisfied him as to her capabilities. He knew many a woman of twice her apparent age, who would have been puzzled how to act in such an emergency, as that she had passed through, and he thought all the more highly of her, that she made no professions.

“To-morrow, I may very probably put in a claim for your help on Captain Murray’s behalf. At least, if I fail in obtaining the nurse from London, whom I hope to find disengaged.”

The mention of Julian’s name gave Maud courage to ask how he was.

Mr. White was very chattily disposed, and he proceeded, partly in simple words, partly in tech-

nical phrase, to explain the state of the case. No limbs were broken, but there was still great cause for alarm. Captain Murray was so bruised by being dragged, that it was next to impossible to say, till the morrow, what the extent of the injuries he had received might be. Concussion of the brain was the least apparent evil, the greater, the fracture of the ribs on both sides. This last did not at first sound alarming, till Mr. White went on to say that he much feared some injury had already been inflicted on the lungs by the sharp ends of the broken bones. A London physician, in the same circumstances, would have kept his own counsel, till the result was more certain; but Mr. White could not restrain the outpourings of his anxiety, and he talked of consumption, and shook his head ominously, as he added he hoped Captain Murray might not suffer eventually.

At the foot of the stairs they met Herbert, who begged his sister to go and inquire, in person, as to the welfare of Lady Louis Crichton.

He need not have been anxious. Lady Louis had quite recovered the shock to her nerves, and perfectly understood making herself comfortable. She had dispatched her maid to forage for her, and her dinner had that moment been served; and while

she was answering her questions, and giving all the particulars she knew, Maud had the satisfaction of seeing her make an excellent repast, and discuss, not only successive courses, but a due proportion of wine. She would fain have induced Miss Bingley to eat and drink also, but Maud was too excited to sit down, and too anxious to feel anything but an intense loathing for food. She never liked Lady Louis so little as at that moment; her personal attractions all seemed to have paled under the influence of her cold egotism, while the very careless *déshabille* in which she was indulging, marred all her pretensions to beauty; for even at that moment, Maud could not help noticing the effect of the soiled and tumbled dressing-gown; it assorted so strangely with the jewelled hands and arms, the light fresh dress which had been cast aside, and the still more gorgeous evening toilet, which was spread out upon the bed. Lady Louis was almost repulsive to her when she began coolly to discuss the chances of Julian's life and death, and to talk as though his dying would be quite an every-day event.

Maud was not sorry to be summoned to speak to her brother in the dining-room. It gave her an excuse for quitting an uncongenial atmosphere.

Colonel Kennedy, Sir George Vanston, Mr. Grey, were all there. A few dishes had been put down at one end of the long table, for, till we die, we daily dine. Herbert bade his sister sit down, and one of the other gentlemen pushed one of the great scarlet leather arm-chairs, which usually stood by the fire, up to the table for her.

The reaction had brought a brilliant colour to Maud's cheeks, her eyes were bright and glistening, and, owing little to art, she did not look the worse that her bonnet had been hastily cast aside, and her hair thereby somewhat disordered.

Very little was said. Everyone spoke in subdued, quiet tones. Colonel Kennedy was utterly silenced; he did not eat a thing, but poured out and drank glass after glass of wine.

Herbert, with a glance at the door, which led to it, told his sister Mr. Murray was shut up in his study. He would not come forth, and it was with difficulty he had been persuaded to listen to him, when he brought him the tidings, that they might hope. He studiously refused to go and see Julian. Colonel Kennedy, and himself were going to sit up that night.

Sir George Vanston said, as he could be of no use, he should go back to town on the morrow.

And the phlegmatic Mr. Grey remarked, speaking for the first time, that, though he supposed he must put up at Windsor to see the races out, his pleasure was spoilt. He should not get it out of his head just yet. He did not say what troubled his opaque mind. No one—like the soft, luxurious, fashionable Lady Louis—discussed the accident, or anticipated its result; and Maud went up stairs, comforted and reassured, if not altogether consoled.




CHAPTER XIII.

"The air is damp, and hush'd, and close,
As a sick man's room, when he taketh repose
An hour before death."

TENNYSON.

" ' Man,' say our sages, ' hath a fickle mind,
And pleasures pall, if long enjoy'd they be.
But I, methinks, like this soft summer day,
'Mid bloom and sweets could wear the hours away.' "

King Arthur.

 HE house was early astir the next morning, and, before she was dressed, Herbert came to his sister's door with a very downcast face, and anything but cheerful tidings.

Julian had passed a very feverish and restless night. Yesterday they thought he knew those about him, at least at times; to-day every glimmering of consciousness had departed, and it was quite pitiful to hear his moans. Mr. Murray had

sent off to town by electric telegraph for further advice ; but, by way of antidote to this really wise act, he must needs quarrel with Mr. White, for no better reason than because that worthy man could not be prevailed on to say, there was no danger.

Herbert looked worn and worried ; he had been sitting up all night.

" It is very unsatisfactory," he remarked, " having to act for a person like Mr. Murray. He will not go near the sick room himself, and finds fault, when everything has been done for the best."

Maud could quite sympathise in this state of affairs, but Herbert would not be comforted ; he thought himself the most ill-used person in the world, and despondingly wished " it might end well."

When her toilet was completed, Maud knocked doubtfully at Mrs. Murray's door, and, rather to her surprise, was admitted. That lady was not up ; she fancied herself very ill, though her sufferings certainly had not made any considerable ravages in her appearance ; the events of yesterday, however, had so far an effect, that she actually thanked Maud graciously for her attentions of the night before.

" Percival told me all about it. And now I

must just ask you to go down and reason with Mr. Murray. Stay, my keys are on the table; you had better make breakfast at once."

Maud rather shrank from her embassy, and suggested that she should send her uncle up stairs.

"He has been backwards and forwards, in and out of the room, ever since daybreak," was the fretful response. "I only hope I have got rid of him at last; I am far from well; and when Mr. Murray is in this sort of humour, it is no use arguing."

Under any other circumstances, Maud might have smiled at the tone of these complaints, but she was too anxious just now to be amused, and her aunt went on. "I am so uneasy about Julian, though I believe the best thing that could be done was to send for Mr. C—, but Percival tells me Mr. White is not pleased."

Maud explained the state of the case, as Herbert had reported it to her.

"How foolish of Mr. Murray! but it is just like him; men are always so tiresome if left to themselves. Go down now and see if nothing can be done."

Maud was at the door, when her aunt called her back.

"Do any of these people talk of going? Surely, now, Ada Crichton will not care to stay for the ball to-night?"

"Sir George Vanston and Mr. Grey are only waiting to hear Mr. C—'s opinion," returned Maud; "so, at least, Herbert said, but I do not know about Lady Louis; I do not think she is stirring yet."

Maud made her appearance below in the nick of time. Mr. Murray had just rung both bells, and was inquiring of the butler, in a tone of suppressed anger, whether they were to have breakfast, or not.

"Oh! so your aunt is not coming down," said he, testily.

It was the only remark he vouchsafed during the whole course of the meal. One by one the gentlemen of the party dropped in; but the surly grunt, with which Mr. Murray received their morning salutations, could hardly be considered tantamount to a connected speech.

He was still sitting stirring his tea, and Maud was patiently waiting till it pleased him to rise from table, when wheels were heard grating on the gravel, and almost at the same moment the hall-door bell rung loudly.

Maud went up to her own room, but she had

not been there five minutes, before Mrs. Murray sent to seek her; she did not consider herself equal to getting up, but she had an unlimited capacity for conversation, and her niece had temporarily risen into importance.

By the same train which brought the great surgeon, the nurse Mr. White had mentioned evidently arrived. At least, Maud had caught sight of a nice-looking, plainly-dressed woman, waiting in the hall, and was able to satisfy both her aunt's curiosity and Percival's surmises on this head; and this was not all they were destined to hear on the subject, for Mr. Murray's wrathful tones soon penetrated even to his wife's apartment.

"Send her away! Let her go out of the house! We don't want any nurses here!"

Somebody tried to intercede, but though Percival, by her lady's orders, opened the door, it was only Mr. Murray's angry voice which reached so far.

"I don't care; there are plenty of women in this house already; what are they good for, if not one of them can nurse a sick man?"

Who ventured to argue the point, Mrs. Murray could not guess.

"I tell you, I'll have no nurse in my house. I

never knew one who was worth a fly ; they are all drunkards and thieves."

This apparently settled the question, for the railway fly, which had brought the unfortunate victim, on whom Mr. Murray expended all his concentrated wrath and long pent up disquietude, was called back, and Percival, who opined " it was one of those good creatures from Queen's Square," reported that she had gone away in tears.

Mrs. Murray pettishly bade her be silent.

" You know nothing at all about it. I dare say it is one of those hypocritical sisters of mercy. Mr. Murray is quite right."

Percival was not to be put down ; she knew her own value, and her own privileges. Maud admired her courage in persisting in speaking the truth.

" The lady she last lived with, owed her life," according to her account, " to a nurse who came from the same establishment. Mrs. Murray might know best ; for her part she did not understand the difference between High Church and Low Church ; but the establishment she meant had nothing to do with Papists ; and if they called themselves sisters of mercy, it was not a name to be ashamed of."

The discussion was not ended, when Maud,

standing at the window, reported that the carriage had come round, and Mr. C— was going away. Mr. White's pony was still being led up and down ; and while mistress and maid were speculating on what had been the result of so short a consultation, Herbert softly called her.

“ Come back and tell me, if anything fresh happens,” said her aunt.

Herbert was so eager, he hardly waited till his sister was out of the room, to speak.

“ Maud, should you much mind helping with some leeches ? I shall never be able to manage with them.”

He scarcely waited for her assent ; and, before she had time to think about it, she found herself at Julian's bed-side.

The room was darkened, and at first coming out of the bright sunlight, she was too much dazzled to distinguish anything, save the white form which lay motionless, though propped by pillows into almost a sitting posture.

Mr. White was himself applying leeches to poor Julian's chest and side ; but he was anxious to be released so soon as anyone could be found competent to the task, for other patients claimed his attention, and the morning was fast slipping away.

Herbert had told his sister that the great London authority had pronounced all to have been done that man could do, and had paid Mr. White some very justly deserved compliments; but these had not sufficed to appease the quaint little man, who really had cause to be vexed, for Mr. Murray thwarted him on every point, and was still obstinate as to a nurse, though, as had been discovered in the course of the last half-hour, there was not a maidservant in the house, who was likely to be of the least use in such an emergency. One was too full of airs and graces, another nervous, and a third quaked at the sight of blood.

Herbert and Colonel Kennedy were quite relieved, when, without a word, Maud took her place at the doctor's side. With the best will in the world, they were clumsy and heavy-handed, while she seemed to know by intuition what was wanted, and to comprehend, without effort, directions which sounded strangely in their ears. The clouds cleared from Mr. White's knitted brows, as he stood watching her proceedings, and the corners of his mouth were no longer elongated, still he made no comment.

He was just leaving the room, when he turned back.

"You will not desert your post, Miss Bingley? I may depend on you, at least, till I come again?" he added, seeing that Maud looked a little doubtful.

She, on her part, remembered that she had hurried downstairs without asking any permission, nor did she feel by any means sure that Mr. Murray, if not her aunt, might not take umbrage at her present position.

"I will do all I can. I will stay as long as I am able."

For all his shabby coat and vacillating manner, Mr. White was a shrewd and clever man, and knew something of the world and its ways. He was quite aware that, in his own eyes, the old manufacturer was a far more important personage than a royal duke, and, of a surety, infinitely more stubborn and hard to bend; and this was not the first time Mr. White had seriously revolved giving up the case into other hands. A shadow less of difficulty and danger, and he had not hesitated; it was love of his science which alone weighed with him; regard for the rich Mr. Murray of Bankside had nothing to do with it. According to Mr. White's philosophy, life and health are the true conditions of humanity, and, because a wilful old man thwarted him, should he leave fell disease

proffers of service; and, better still, there was Paton, "Captain Murray's own man," as the pompous Mrs. Benham called him, who was a host in his own strength, and as well pleased as Mr. White himself had been, to see Miss Bingley, as he oft-times expressed it below, "take her proper place."

Paton had seen something of the world, and was a very good specimen of his class; he would have been puzzled to explain on what he founded his positive conclusions, but, of a surety, he had been a staunch supporter of that young lady, since the moment when he took her in charge, at the Windsor railway station.

The business of the leeches over, the sick room was soon cleared; there was no need of superfluous attendants, for every unnecessary movement, or idle whisper, evidently disturbed poor Julian, and, last of all, Colonel Kennedy propounded to Maud that he should go away, and return by the time Mr. White came again. He said he was going down to the barracks, but, in her own mind, Maud felt sure he was going to Ascot to see the great race of the day, and the event proved she was not far wrong in her suspicions.

Twelve o'clock struck; one, two, and three; but Herbert never made his appearance. Maud knew

he was not a racing man ; he was not off to Ascot, she felt sure. She could only suppose he was gone to take some rest ; for even Paton, though positively denying he was at all fatigued with sitting up, had withdrawn to the window-seat outside his master's door, and was sleeping soundly.

She was very anxious, but for hours no one came to share her cares. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Murray had ventured to enter the presence of the unconscious sufferer ; the old man ever and again came to the foot of the stairs ; and Maud, who more than once stole down to make her report, read in his averted face, the dread he dared not put in words.

Neither could she venture to say aught to allay the fear, which arose unbidden in her own heart. She could not put it forth when she looked on the features, yesterday radiant with health, and *mobile* with life ; to-day so white, so fixed, and with no expression, save at intervals one of extreme distress and pain.

For a long time Maud never gave a single thought to Lady Louis Crichton ; she almost forgot the fact of her existence, and, till she heard her voice beneath the windows calling to her little dog, she certainly fancied she had taken her departure with the other guests.

One of the large casements at the end of the room was open, and, parting the heavy curtains with her hand, Maud commanded a view of the broad sloping lawn, which, from the back of the house, where Julian's room was situated, stretched away into the shrubberies and woods beyond.

There, beneath a large oak tree, in a rustic chair, sat Lady Louis Crichton, and there, too, was Herbert, lying upon the grass before her feet. The sun shone, birds sang, flowers bloomed, all was brilliant, garish summer! what did they reckon of pain and mortal suffering close at hand? The light breeze bore the soft murmur of their voices to Maud where she stood; she could not hear their words, but they, too, were happy—for the moment the one was all in all to the other; and when Herbert lifted the soft white hand, that was outstretched towards him, to his lips, Maud turned away, and the first tears she had shed fell heavily on Julian's dying bed.

Dinner was served on that day at the unusual hour of five. Lady Louis Crichton was to return to town in the evening, when the bustle incident on the races had subsided. Why she had stayed so long, or not taken advantage of the quieter hours of mid-day, Maud did not presume to ask;

she only saw that her prolonged presence, as well as his wife's continued absence, irritated Mr. Murray. He was anxious and uneasy, and showed it towards herself, not by unkindness, but by hurrying her upstairs before the cloth was removed; some slight noise or movement in Julian's room, having reawakened fears, which hardly slumbered for a moment.

Later Herbert came to fetch her to bid Lady Louis good-by. She was waiting for her in the hall, and the carriage was at the door.

"Why have you shut yourself up all day? I wanted you sadly with me," was her ladyship's greeting. "However," continued she, without waiting for an answer, "I believe it was your brother's fault; so, to make up for it, you must promise to come and stay with me in London."

"Some day," began Maud.

"You must not put it off. This is just the gayest time of year, and I mean you to be very much admired. You had better fix next week; and then, perhaps, you may help me to make up my mind."

Maud glanced inquiringly at her brother.

"He may tell you all about it when I am gone, for I fancy you can keep a secret."

Only one day back, and Maud would have been delighted at the hopes raised by these words. Now, though she could hardly say why, Lady Louis's manner woke up a dissatisfied, carping spirit in her heart.

"Don't look at me so gravely, Maud; as it is, I believe I have done a very foolish thing."

"I hope not," was all the answer she received.

"At all events, it is not irrevocable. My mind is not like the laws of the Medes and Persians; on the contrary, it is often changed."

"I am glad of it," interposed Herbert, with an eager earnestness, which quite grieved his sister. "Now I have the more cause for hope."

Apparently Lady Louis did not listen to anybody but herself, at any rate she changed the subject.

"And poor Captain Murray—is he better at last?"

"He is not worse," was the quiet response.

"Do you know why I was so pressed to come?" whispered Lady Louis in Maud's ear. "You will never guess. They fancied I should marry poor Julian."

"Hush! Hush!" said Herbert, catching her meaning. He had better taste than the lady of his love.

“ Well! when you are tired of nursing him, come to me. I should like just to show Mrs. Murray what attractive metal her little niece is made of.”


And, kissing Maud, who could hardly bring herself to return the salutation with proper warmth, Lady Louis took Herbert’s arm, and suffered him to lead her to the carriage.



CHAPTER XIV.

"It is a lover's hell
To doubt—and yet I falter—fear—Oh! Love
In all its extasy is mixed with dread—
Is troubled ever—there is so much to lose,
That the heart broods upon its airy treasure
As fearful as a miser o'er his gold."

King Arthur.

 R. Murray was not the most considerate person in the world. He seemed to think everything must bow to the convenience of him and his; and, if it had been left to him, Maud would have passed the night, as she had done the entire day, in watching by Julian's bed of pain.

Mr. White put his veto on this. He came for the third time at midnight, and, since he had very discreetly possessed himself of Mrs. Murray's ear, he did pretty much as he liked, not unopposed, however, but having made up his mind to it; and,

really, anyone might have thought it was a pleasure to him to argue every point, for he never hesitated to indulge Mr. Murray with a long and wordy discussion on every arrangement; and certainly these loud contests were so far of service, in that they acted as a safety-valve for the anxiety, which would not permit Mr. Murray to eat, drink, or sleep, though he persisted in going through all the forms common to men of his settled habits.

It was Mr. White who dispatched Maud to bed, with an exordium respecting the regular life necessary to one who had the prospect of spending the larger portion of her waking hours in the heavy atmosphere of a sick room, and that for many days to come. He was very methodical and precise, which was fortunate, else half the establishment, in the excess of their goodwill, would have been sitting up with their young master; and, rather to Colonel Kennedy's disgust, he pitched upon fat, motherly Mrs. Benham to share the watch they were jointly to keep till morning broke.

Maud retired, but not to sleep; far into the night, with restless steps, Herbert paced the narrow limits of his sister's room. His excitement could not brook solitude and silence; and again and again he must pour the history of his love, his

hopes, his fears, into the sympathising ear of this ready listener.

There was a repose in Maud's gentle, feminine, loving ways, which fell like evening dew on his fevered spirits, still agitated by all the tumultuous joys, and fitful passions of the preceding hours. The fever, which is man's heritage, was on him—that engrossing fever, which to the few is life, but a living death, a long annihilation for the many. His flushed face, eager looks, and feverish accents, each and all betrayed in what fiery guise the pitiless destroyer had flown to Herbert's heart; but for the time being he was happy, doubts, difficulties, and delays seeming as nothing in his present mood.

If Maud trembled for the stability of the happiness he felt so sure, her misgivings had hardly as yet taken a tangible form or shape; indeed, it was not till the moment when her brother told her his fate yet hung in abeyance, that Julian's warnings recurred to her memory in all their pristine meaning. His words lost nothing of their strength, in that he, who so lately uttered them, had, by one of those sudden chances, those startling and visible changes, which ever and again cross the path of man, abruptly passed from the bright sunlight of

vigorous existence, far down into the dark valley, where the shadowy confines of life and death meet and blend. Nor could she forget the Lady Louis of the preceding evening; cool and careless, luxurious and self-indulgent, full of care for her own selfish fancies, while hardly according one passing thought to the distress and sorrow which so nearly touched others; forgetting even the agony of witnessed suffering, so soon as its reality had passed from her own sight. The halo had been glowing enough, with which, for four-and-twenty hours, Maud's imagination had invested the object of Herbert's worship, and, under ordinary circumstances, it might have lived on, blinding, by its very brightness, her acute senses to faults, which, veiled beneath the courtesies of a studied manner, were graceful, even in their deformity.

With Herbert the illusion was still complete, and, whatever her own judgment might lead her to think, his sister did not feel competent to the task of combating such strong prepossessions. She wondered whether she could and ought to speak; but, after all, as she reflected, what had she to allege against Lady Louis Crichton? Facts there were none; she had only Julian's opinion, and her own intuitive feeling to go upon; and Herbert

might well scoff at this new-born prejudice, which took exception with the manner he thought so fascinating, and could find subject of complaint in the characteristics, which he found most charming.

Maud was not naturally reserved, but she was diffident, and the coldness, not to say harshness, she met with at Mrs. Murray's hands, had given a doubt and uncertainty to her manner, which was not only foreign to her character, but infinitely to be regretted.

Herbert felt her hesitation, but, as he never liked to hear an opinion expressed which was contrary to his own, he did not attempt to examine its cause, but only proceeded to justify the conduct of the lady of his choice in a way, from which it might be augured that he was not, at the bottom of his heart, quite as satisfied as he wished his sister, and persuaded himself, to believe that he was.

"Lady Louis is so unlike other women," said he, in answer to an exclamation which escaped Maud, on finding her brother had received no definite promise. "It is impossible to judge her by an ordinary standard;" and he went on to re-iterate that such a response as he had met with, was very different from a refusal.

Whatever she thought, his sister did not dispute the fact.

"Now I understand to what Lady Louis alluded, when we were waiting in the hall. At the time I could not think what she meant about making up her mind," remarked she.

"I thought you answered rather coldly," returned her brother; "but another time you will be forearmed; and I really believe, Mand, if you went to London, as she proposed, you might do a great deal to advance my cause."

"I hardly think Lady Louis is likely to listen to anything I might say on your behalf," replied she, with a smile. "She would be apt to suspect me of being a prejudiced adviser."

"For all that, I think you might have some weight with her," persisted Herbert; "she has taken a great fancy to you—"

"For your sake, I suspect, rather than mine," interposed his sister, archly, "seeing she has but a day's knowledge of my manifold perfections."

The idea pleased Herbert.

"She is a strange, imaginative creature," said he, enthusiastically, "and so little trammelled by ordinary rules of action, that she does not measure her feelings by time, but rather by their strength."

Maud wondered whether she were perverse, or Herbert infatuated. She felt quite tempted to ask why, if this was her rule of action, Lady Louis should insist on a longer period of acquaintance with her devoted lover; but, fortunately, when her brother once got upon the theme of the perfections of his idol, he required nothing better than an attentive, silent listener. Besides, Herbert was so earnestly and thoroughly in love, she could not bear to say a word to damp his fervour or his hopes; but it was with rather dismal forebodings that she heard him—generally so desponding—build airy visions of a future, which might never come, and talk of happiness, which, she began to fancy, was already eluding his grasp.

It might, indeed, very reasonably be doubted whether Lady Louis Crichton ultimately, and upon reflection, would ever really bestow her hand upon a suitor with so little pretension as Herbert Bingley. A craving for excitement, to be gratified at any cost, is the disease of certain minds, and the flirtation, begun in mere thoughtlessness on the part of an idle woman of the world, bid fair to be serious in its results. It was no mere passing ebullition of admiration on Herbert's part, and Lady Louis herself was, for the moment, awed by the

vehemence and intensity of the passion she had inspired ; a passion whose strength seemed identical with its rapid, sudden growth. A woman's ready wit revealed to her that, for once, she was loved for herself alone ; her wealth, her rank, her position, were nothing in Herbert Bingley's eyes. He had never been a practical man, else he had better comprehended how far these separated him from the bright star of a higher sphere, and it had never struck him that the object of his wild, passionate idolatry, was likely to attach more importance to these adjuncts than he did himself.

His thoughtlessness, if it was not without a tinge of egotism, completely deceived Lady Louis. She never dreamed that a man, with but three hundred a-year, would venture to aspire to the hand of a woman, who had passed in review, if they had not actually been within her reach, some of the best matches in London. She knew that he was poor. Herbert had never concealed that fact ; but from the first she had fancied him Sir Cuthbert Fielding's heir, and vaguely thought that in future he would, as a matter of course, be much better off.

There is a power in strong emotion, which will make itself felt, a perilous charm, beneath which

the wisest and the weakest have alike succumbed ; and Herbert's eager intensity of expression took effect, even on the shallow, artificial nature, which had been so early placed beneath the harrow of conventuality, so long hedged in by the world, that hardly a genuine impulse, or spontaneous feeling, survived. He poured out his whole soul ; and his impassioned fervour, waking an echo in her void and empty heart, for a moment almost deluded Lady Louis herself into believing, that she reciprocated his passion. Before that eager affection her vanity and frivolity paled, and, for once in her life of studied conquests, Lady Louis's words were uncertain and vacillating.

Such women, isolated by circumstances from the dependance which is their nature, are rarely open, sincere, candid, or conscientious. With them, too, any sentiment is generally very transient ; and no wonder, for the romance which it is the prerogative of their sex to cherish, is fritted away in idle flirtations and frothy fancies, hardly worthy to be designated as love, while in that yearning, clinging affection, that entire absorption of the heart, which, in a mutual attachment, makes for their gentler, calmer sisters, the epoch of a life, they have no faith, still less any share.

Cold and calculating to her very heart's core, any passing effervescence of emotion was hardly likely to weigh for long with Lady Louis Crichton. She was not a person to forget in a moment of infatuation, the modes of thought and motives of action, that had been hers so long, that they had grown into her very nature. Accordingly, while Herbert was yet in the seventh heaven, firmly believing, too, that he had carried up the lady of his affections with him, seated on the same golden carpet of love as himself; she was fast falling back upon the prosaic realities of earth, and, in her secret heart, was wondering how she should get herself out of the scrape.

She did it cleverly; and while she unhesitatingly accepted the proffered devotion of her willing slave, and with soft looks, and faithless smiles, riveted the chains he wore so proudly, she took care herself to remain unfettered by a single promise. She talked of the future, she bade him wait, she reminded him how few the weeks had been, since they were utter strangers; but there was no denial in the slightly tremulous tones, or coldness in the momentarily averted look. Poor Herbert! he was utterly vanquished by all these little graceful coquetries, and finished arts; and even when she

told him—and with truth, though she least of all meant this to be believed—that she was “uncertain, changeable, and fickle,” he gave about as much heed to her words as he did to the fitful, sighing breeze murmuring around them, meet pre-sage of the coming storm, luridly gathering behind the sun.

If it had been Arthur, Maud would have detected in a moment even the shadow of a doubt, and, in her turn, would have opened her heart without the slightest idea of reserve; but with her eldest brother it was different. She stood on more form with him; and the very fact that, in this moment of confidence, she found it expedient to weigh her words, made her distinctly feel how much more familiar she was with him, than really intimate.

It was Herbert's own fault, if his sister had lately come a little to mistrust him. Maud had been ready enough to enshrine him in the soft, girlish heart, which had been robbed of all its nearer objects of worship, and at first Herbert had appeared to return her affection, and to bestow on her an amount of consideration and devotion, which unfortunately made his after caprice and carelessness, only the more apparent.

As the world goes, this was only what might have

been expected. Herbert Bingley had no great stability of purpose, or character, and in London, being occupied, and engrossed, by people and pursuits in which his orphaned sister had little part, he gradually forgot all those nearer and dearer interests which had, for a time, drawn them so closely together. Maud never complained. Very early in her young life, she had learned for her mother's sake to practise a certain steady patience, and quiet endurance under inevitable evils, which, if hardly integral parts of her quick, impulsive nature, had, at any rate, grown into a strong principle of action. Still, though she would not murmur, it was no reason she did not feel; and if Herbert had not been quite so self-engrossed, he might have detected, from the tone of his sister's letters, that she was not quite as happy in her new home, as he chose to take it for granted she must be, because, forsooth, she was free from the outward pressure of a poverty he felt as galling in the extreme.

His coming to Bankside was the realization of a disappointment often felt, never allowed before. Maud had looked forward to it, depended on it, as only a girl in her isolated condition, and with that thirst after love, and craving for affection, which

was doubly felt in her present life, was likely to do.

Herbert was here, and yet, when Maud at last laid her head down upon the pillow, her latest thought was for the brother who was far, far away.




CHAPTER XV.

" So Marian sat by Lucy's bed, content
With duty, and was strong, for recompense,
To hold the lamp of human love arm-high,
To catch the death-strain'd eyes and comfort them."

AURORA LEIGH.

" I am so sick,
And weary with suspense."

MILMAN.

ANKSIDE was an odd-shaped, old-fashioned house. None of the windows opened to the ground; but there were more doors giving on the garden than are ever seen in a modern mansion.

The entrance was on one side, where, certainly, no architect ever dreamed of placing it. A glass door opened out of the dining-room on to the lawn, and in the further wing, at the foot of the staircase, which now only led to two or three isolated bedrooms, Captain Murray's among others,

was an old-fashioned door into a porch, where Julian and the Bingleys, as children, had played many and many a time.

“The boys’ gardens,” as they were still called, were just outside, and Maud, who was very fond of flowers, had taken them again into her special charge, while the porch was lined with geraniums, and preternaturally forced flowers, which, after figuring in the *jardinières* in the drawing-room and boudoir, were turned out as too sickly to be worth the gardener’s attention. Maud watered and nursed them, till there was always a very respectable show of blossoms, and here Colonel Kennedy caught sight of her, as he was on his way down to breakfast the next morning.

“Who was that I heard talking last night?” began he directly. “I fancied it was your brother’s voice.”

“Herbert kept me up very late, I know,” was the direct answer; “but it was impossible you could have heard us in Julian’s room.”

“To tell you the truth, I did not sit up very long. Mrs. Benham seemed very wide awake, and I was dead beat; it was tremendously hot on the course yesterday.”

Without thinking of it, Colonel Kennedy had

criminated himself. Maud did not esteem him the more highly that when she went into the drawing-room for five minutes the evening before, she had heard him complain to Mrs. Murray that he had been kept by business in barracks the best part of the day. She had no patience with such bare-faced deception, so said directly :—

“ Are you going to Ascot again to-day ? ”

Colonel Kennedy thought it no harm to prevaricate, but he hesitated about telling a downright falsehood.

“ I hardly know ; I ought to go over, if I can. Conway owes me some money, which, if I don't get to-day, I shall never see again. But I shall say nothing about it,” he continued ; “ I hardly think old Murray would like my going with his nephew in this state.”

“ No,” said Maud. “ And that is the way,” thought she, “ he speaks of one, who invariably makes him welcome,” and she swept past the offender, and entered the dining-room, without another word.

Mr. Murray was sitting at the bottom of the table waiting patiently, or rather impatiently, for his wife to make her appearance. He was never very communicative of a morning, and to-day was

more laconic than usual in his answers to Colonel Kennedy's observations; but he graciously bade Maud "sit down,"—a most unusual civility, and one which, after some consideration, she was fain to ascribe to the fact of her having entered the room by the door which led to the part of the house where poor Julian's room was situated.

"Five minutes past ten, Mrs. Murray," said he, as his wife rustled in. "You keep us all waiting for our breakfast," and he watched her round the room with no very kindly eyes.

Mrs. Murray took it very coolly; but in the course of her inquiries after Julian, it came out that Maud had not seen him that morning.

The truth was, she was very chary of putting herself forward in the matter, unless she had special instructions to that effect.

"Who has been interfering? Who has put a stop to the girl's nursing her cousin? Is this your doing, Mrs. Murray?" thundered the master of the house.

Mrs. Murray spoke the literal truth, when she said she "knew nothing about it;" and Maud, in great alarm, and in a rather low voice, hastened to explain that "she did not know she had been wanted to-day; but if she could be of any use—"

"What's that? Speak louder; I don't hear what

you say!" growled Mr. Murray; and she had to repeat this rather lame excuse in a tone audible to the whole table.

"Just so," returned Mr. Murray. "You have acted very rightly; but I wish it to be distinctly understood, that it is my desire you should be as much as possible in your cousin's room, at least, if you yourself have no objection to oblige me." And Mr. Murray looked defiantly over his spectacles, but nobody thought of contradicting him, and he went on:—

"It is a very remarkable thing, that, out of one-and-twenty persons who daily feed at my expense, there is but one, and she little more than a child, capable of the natural duty of nursing a sick man. Have you anything to say to that, Mrs. Murray?"

The person thus appealed to looked annoyed, but she was never at a loss for an answer.

"I think it most kind of Maud," was her distinct response. "I am sure I could not do it myself," added she, *sotto voce*, to Herbert, who all this time had never said a single word. "Indeed, I dread so much seeing poor Julian, that I shall ask Mr. White whether it is right for me to do so."

"It can do him no possible good," remarked Colonel Kennedy.

Mr. Murray never chose to hear, unless he were personally addressed; but, as Maud saw by his face, he was listening to every word of these remarks. He did not have to wait long for a pause; and when everyone was silent he began again, this time personally addressing his terrified neighbour on the right.

“ You will give exactly what orders you please, Maud. This is my house, and the first servant who ventures to disobey Miss Bingley will be discharged. Do you hear ?” said Mr. Murray, in his loudest key, as he turned to the butler, who meantime had entered the room.

The man never moved a muscle.

“ Yes, Sir ;” and he would have answered in the same cool, respectful tone, if he had been desired to turn every person at the breakfast-table out of the room. Maud often marvelled at the practised, impassive faces of the servants, perpetually witnesses of Mr. Murray’s outbursts.

She was very glad when the moment came for rising from table. Mrs. Murray followed her out of the room. “ It does not signify, Maud, what your uncle says ; still, if you will not nurse poor Julian, I do not know who can. I must not venture to say a word about a nurse ; but you can have Percival or Benham with you as much as you like.

I am sure I do not mind what inconvenience I undergo personally."

Maud hastened to disabuse her aunt's mind as to any unwillingness on her part. "Well," said Mrs. Murray, and not unkindly, "we all have our different tastes, and it seems your vocation lies in a sick-room. Percival tells me you are very clever."

Maud smiled sadly. "I am used to illness; that is the real secret."

Mrs. Murray would not have owned she cared about her; but Maud had sufficient influence to persuade her to venture as far as the door of Julian's room.

"You will come in? Indeed, I think Uncle Murray would not be half so miserable if he would only see him," urged she.

"I can't endure the sight of blood," pleaded the elder lady.

"But there is really nothing dreadful; a few scratches on his poor hands and face, and that is all;" and Maud laid her soft fingers on her arm.

"I am sure he looks frightful," said Mrs. Murray, who called herself a sensible woman.

Maud opened the door. "He lies just as if he were asleep," whispered she; and at last Mrs. Murray suffered her to draw her into the room.

There *was* something awful in the sight of that living death, and none the less so that Paton had brushed his master's dark hair quite off the pale face, which looked years older than it had, only the day before.

Mrs. Murray stood tremblingly by. She was not altogether destitute of better feelings; but the world and prosperity, self-indulgence and love of ease, had gone far towards deteriorating a character, which was not naturally feeble.

"Speak to him, Maud," faltered she, at length, in an altered, husky voice.

"It only makes him restless and uneasy," was her low-toned reply, and, as though to confirm her words, a quick, sharp moan was heard. The insensible sufferer tried to move his hand towards his fevered head, and Mrs. Murray was gone; she was literally afraid to stay.

"So different from Miss Bingley," as Paton said in those after times, when all these little events became matter of history with him.

Days went by, and no great change took place. Whatever may be said or written on the subject, no emotion in the world ever did, or ever will endure for long together. It is not in human nature that it should. The strong feeling may recur, and

return, over and over again ; it may never utterly vanish, but, like the ebbing, flowing tide, it must have its intervals of change, be it hope, despair, or that calm, dull repose, which partakes of both extremes of feeling.

And so it was at Bankside. By the end of the week Colonel Kennedy came and went as usual: Mrs. Murray dressed and dined, wrote notes, and received the condolences of the neighbourhood in true conventional fashion ; and Mr. Murray walked about the grounds, and scolded the workmen quite as loudly and authoritatively as usual. Certainly, he did not go to London, nor could he bring himself to look at his letters from his broker ; but he suddenly discovered great extravagance was the result of his being so much from home, and Goodacre was only allowed to remain in the garden on sufferance ; the coachman was severely reprimanded ; an embargo was laid on every bottle of wine that issued from the cellar ; and, finally, the very chickens were deprived of their barley, and a very stringent dietary of herbs substituted in its room.

“ It could not go on for ever,” as Mrs. Benham sagely remarked ; but meanwhile the whole household at Bankside, from the scullerymaid upwards, were kept in that pleasant frame of mind, which

in vulgar parlance is called "being in perpetual hot water."

Maud was the only person Mr. Murray did not worry, but none the less she had her anxieties. She was too soft-hearted to be easy about Julian, whom every hour of nursing and attention seemed to bring nearer and nearer to herself. Nor was he her only care; Herbert made perpetual demands upon her sympathy and interest. He wrote long letters to Lady Louis Crichton, and for a day or two was content with a tiny note, which was all he got in return. Saturday afternoon, even that poor consolation failed him, and he went upstairs to announce to Maud that he "was off to London within the hour."

This made his sister look very grave. Percival was sitting hemming flounces in the only corner of the room where any light was admitted, and as she was possessed of very sharp ears, Maud suggested an adjournment to the staircase.

"I can't stand this suspense," began Herbert. "I must see her again."

"I thought you heard from Lady Louis yesterday," answered Maud.

"Letters are always so unsatisfactory," returned Herbert, who twenty-four hours previous had

been of quite another opinion. "If I go up I may prevail on her to come to some decision."

Maud looked out of the window. The scene under the old oak tree came back to her mind, and Herbert was startled by the result of her reflections.

"And what is more, were I you, I should insist upon a definite answer. I think it is your right."

"And get thrown over altogether," sighed he.

"Not if Lady Louis has a spark of feeling," urged Maud, "and I suppose you would not care to marry a wife, who did not really love you."

"It is no use talking," said Herbert, fretfully. "I must be content to wait; Lady Louis only asks for time."

"Then let it be a definite time, six weeks, or six months, if that suits her better," rejoined Maud. "Depend on it, you will lose nothing by being firm."

For his part, Herbert was quite astonished by his sister's decision, and stood twirling his moustache, and looking the picture of despair.

"Anything would be happier for you than this suspense," resumed Maud. "And I am very sure Lady Louis will like you none the less if she finds you will not be trifled with."

"Suppose she refuses me on the spot," said the man of timid counsels.

"Better now," returned his adviser, "than six months hence. Delays are dangerous," remarked she, more lightly, seeing Herbert's vacillating face.

"After all, what have I to offer?" began the lover.

"It is too late to think of that now," was Maud's firm response. "Besides, women are not mercenary where they give their hearts."

This little touch of sentiment quite vanquished Herbert. "There are all her first husband's relations; that is the worst of it," remarked he, but the desponding look was gone.

"Lady Louis will not be influenced by any one of them. She is not the sort of person."

Maud spoke without reflection, but she was right. Herbert's handsome face, and fine, soldier-like figure weighed far more with Lady Louis than the best advice in the world. They had first won him favour with this fickle fair one, and his only chance lay in being able to extort from her a positive pledge, ere her first impressions had evaporated.

Ada Crichton might have married over and over again before this, and have won, by her possessions and fascinations, wealth and position, even

greater and higher than that she already possessed, or, better far than either, have been loved for herself alone ; but while, on the one hand, the gay widow did not care to part with her liberty and independence, on the other, she was of too shallow and artificial a nature, to understand, or value real feeling. She rejected the true metal with the same careless, smiling insolence, as that with which she trampled under foot the brazen counterfeit of love—a counterfeit which her riches, sufficient in themselves, and magnified by report, had brought many a needy man of the world to simulate.

Maud rather dreaded the result when she saw Herbert preparing to start.

“ I act upon your advice, Maud ; are you prepared for the consequences ? ” laughed he, now in the highest spirits.

“ I shall be glad to see you back ; and, Herbert, do not stay, remember—”

“ Yes, yes, I know ; but nobody is the better for my hanging about here doing nothing. I can do Julian no real good.”

So he went ; and she was left to her own reflections, which were not over-pleasant. At the last Herbert looked in, and in a whisper warned her to be very cautious, in what she said to Mr.

or Mrs. Murray ; and, indeed, Maud half expected they would question her as to her brother's sudden whim.

She need not have been afraid ; the inquiries and calls of their acquaintance always formed the staple topic at dinner, and to-day a direct message of inquiry from the Castle itself swamped all minor events, and won from Mr. Murray the first smile which had been seen on his face since the dreadful event of Tuesday.



CHAPTER XVI.

"On Sunday, Heaven's gate stands ope,
Blessings are plentiful and rife,
More plentiful than hope."

GEO. HERBERT.



UNDAY was hardly like what it is elsewhere at Bankside, and for a long time certainly it was the most miserable day in all the week to Maud.

Mrs. Murray never came down till luncheon-time; nor did Mr. Murray esteem it other than as a leisure day, of which he might take advantage to settle his accounts, and look over the cellar and servants' books.

In the afternoon the carriage always came round as usual; for, though Mrs. Murray thought it "bad style" to take a regular drive, she preferred the gaiety of afternoon service at St. George's Chapel in Windsor, to presenting herself at the parish church, which, it must also be said, was equally far off.

Maud Bingley was one, the strength of whose religious feelings were in due proportion to the earnestness of her disposition and character. If it had remained for the days of darkness and distress to bring to her heavy heart, with all the power of reality, the promises and councils, with which Holy Church and Holier Writ comfort and direct the pure in heart of every age, her life was not now so prosperous and happy, that she could afford to dispense with that, which had come to be her great support, or endure to be deprived of those outward ordinances, which to her embodied, in all their grand reality, the essential articles of our Faith, so oft repeated, but too seldom felt in all their true significance:—"The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

To the little chapel in Windsor Park, accordingly, Maud had found her way for many Sundays past. It was some distance off; and, though she took her path through the Bankside shrubberies, and the quietest glades of the Great Park, her solitary walk was not without its terrors, and they not the less trying, in that they were more imaginary than real.

In process of time, Maud came to take pleasure

in this effort at independence. It was not difficult, by timing her arrival and departure early and late enough, to avoid coming into contact with any of the congregation, almost all of the higher orders, and to her far more awful than the wild deer, or even the red stags, who hardly noticed her as she passed.

Afternoon service was another difficulty. Maud had been always used to go twice, and she could not bear to stay quietly at home; and yet it grieved her quick conscience to go in the carriage, and deprive alike horses and servants of their Sabbath rest. Once, when Mrs. Murray stayed at home, she walked to the parish church, for the second time, under Percival's *chaperonage*. It did not do, however; when she got there, she could only sit in a corner and listen with dull unconsciousness to the long familiar words; and Percival, who had a due sense of her own power, privilege, and prerogative, fumed and fretted the whole way back at the young lady's pale face, and threatened, positively threatened, she would tell "her mistress, if ever Miss Bingley went for to do it again."

Maud knew she was right. She could hardly creep down to dinner, "nor hold up her head," as Percival expressed it, for many days to come; and,

had it not been for that privileged person, who confessed below-stairs to being "very partial to her young lady," as she called her, she would have found it very difficult to conceal how nearly it had made her ill.

There was no help for it. Bankside was two miles away from any church. Maud could only walk once; but it was with many compunctions, and no small fear of being wrong in her judgment, that she decided on accompanying Mrs. Murray every Sunday afternoon to St. George's. She hoped it was not wrong; she trusted it might be right; at any rate, it saved certain discussion, possible dissension, and Maud could not feel it was her duty to remonstrate with one so much older than herself, on the score of having out a carriage. Besides, there was the question, would Mrs. Murray listen to her?

The Sunday which followed this memorable week brought no change with it for Julian; day and night he alike lay with closed eyes, or, if they opened for a minute, their expression was so changed and altered, that Maud gladly saw them close again.

She got up very early and sat two hours and more with him before breakfast; the morning was

always his most tranquil time, and she settled that, at all events, she might venture to church in the forenoon. It was there she could alone hope to find the help and strength she dreaded yet might be sorely needed. Those have been spared much, who have not looked on the face of the dead, and Maud was not ignorant how powerless and vain is all human aid in the dread hour, when man puts off this mortal coil, and passes into the presence of his Maker.

Mrs. Benham was well pleased to be asked to sit with her young master during Miss Bingley's absence. She was a very responsible person, and, though Maud personally preferred the aid of Percival, whom she felt less scruple in ordering to do this or that, yet she had an idea that this quick-witted young woman would, if left alone, find it too congenial an occupation to comfort Mr. Paton, to think much about his master.

These arrangements made, Maud put on her bonnet, paid a last visit to Julian's room, and ran down stairs again, half fearing to be late. In the porch, the last place she expected to see him, she met Mr. Murray face to face.

"Eh! what's this?" was his startled interrogatory.

"I am going to church," was Maud's prompt reply. She had no time to think of propitiating him, or to turn her sentence more smoothly.

"To where?" repeated Mr. Murray, in no small surprise.

"To the little chapel in the Park." One thing which pleased the man of business, was the straightforward answers he always received from Maud.

Mr. Murray drew out his large, old-fashioned gold watch.

"It is full late," remarked he, as he turned to walk by her side.

Maud was chary of hazarding any remark, particularly as now she had full time to reflect that her uncle might not be particularly pleased at this independent course of action.

Mr. Murray's next question left her still in doubt.

"Do you always go to church this way, and alone?"

A reply in the affirmative, and again they walked on in silence.

"I used to go to a Presbyterian place of worship, twice, ay, and three times a-day; but that was years and years ago," and Mr. Murray walked on quicker than before.

"I suppose you would not think that going to church," added he.

"I think I should, if I had been born and brought up in Scotland," was all Maud ventured to say.

A little further, and they reached the gate which led into the high road, and a few paces higher up was the wicket, by which Maud entered Windsor Great Park.

The gate was unlocked, and she was through, before Mr. Murray again opened his lips. When he did, it was with trouble in his voice.

"Maud, do they ever pray for people in church here? Do you think it would be any use?"—

He broke off, only to resume still more abruptly.

"For Julian, my poor boy! I would do anything to save him!"

She opened her Prayer Book at the passage:—

"For all who are afflicted or distressed, in mind, body, or estate."

Mr. Murray had to wipe his glasses, and that more than once, before he read it through.

"You will see that it is done, eh? Maud? What do you really think?" said he, anxiously.

"It is the best hope we can have," returned Maud.

"But," she added, lower still, "it is as God

pleases, 'In His hands are the issues of life and death.'"

She spoke in all simplicity, from the very depths of her heart. If there had been the slightest desire to sermonize on her part, the keen old man would have detected it in a moment. He hated above all things to be made to feel himself wrong, and it went too much against the natural reverence, and deep self-searching of Maud's mind, for her even to think in condemnation.

Mr. Murray was old, and grey-headed, and if he had long put away, he had never quite forgotten the teaching of his youth. A cold, stern, uncompromising religion, a service of fear, not of love, was that in which he had been trained. The man had shaken off the trammels of that, which had been enforced upon the boy; and perhaps there was not a house in all England, where high and holy things were less thought of, than in the rich manufacturer's home at Bankside. But, for all that, the old man was exceedingly superstitious; he watched and waited for Maud on her return from church, to hear exactly what had been done; and it was not fancy which made her believe he was aggrieved and disappointed, when told on that evening that Julian was worse again.

It was the same thing every night and morning. Mr. Murray kept his own counsel on this point. He knew better than anyone how much sympathy he might expect from his worldly-minded wife; but it went to Maud's heart to see the reproachful look with which he daily met her, as though he thought she had power to wring from Heaven the life which was all the world to him. It was a strange kind of union, but none the less was it a tie between the girl's homeless heart, and the hard old man, who had one pure, unselfish corner in his breast, that in which he enshrined his nephew.

Up to this moment, Julian Murray had been strong, hale, and hearty; he had never known what it was to have a single day's illness, and this fact, coupled with a shock at least as great as any evident injury, had brought on fever, which rose to an alarming height, on any, even the very smallest, relaxation of the most stringent remedies.

It was this, which appeared to be surely wearing away life and strength alike. Night after night Julian was delirious, and though Maud professed never to sit up with him, she was rarely in bed before daylight. It was all she and Paton could do, through the darker hours of the night, to keep the unconscious sufferer from doing himself

some material harm ; and even Percival, who considered herself a strong-minded woman, would stand and wring her hands, and cry from very fright at her young master's wild and fevered ravings.

The ninth day came ; a time Maud had looked to and longed for, as likely to bring some change, and it might be for the better. Mr. White was backwards and forwards all that day. When he came for the last time, it was not difficult to divine, from his downcast look, he thought the danger imminent. " If there is no change by morning," was the phrase ever on his lips ; but it was remarked he never progressed beyond that beginning, and Maud felt sick at heart as she saw him leave the room at sunset, without another word as to how all this might end.

From first to last, it had been the greatest difficulty to induce poor Julian to swallow all the drugs and potations, prescribed for his benefit, and often, when most feverish and thirsty, he hardly seemed to have strength to imbibe any of the cooling drinks Maud was ever ready to administer.

" Then," as Paton remarked, " Miss Bingley was a real mercy." She would stand by Julian's

bed-side with untiring patience, and generally succeeded in the end by dint of a gentleness and skill, which seemed almost intuitive.

This evening, the usual farce was being enacted, which Mrs. Benham was wont solemnly to call "the Captain's tea." She held the cup and saucer, and Maud was trying by little and little to prevail on Julian to receive spoonful of the only nourishment he ever took with any degree of readiness.

To-night, though, the head was jerked away, and the impatient hand put up sooner than usual.

"Do, Julian, pray do!" it was the only argument Maud ever used, and she spoke to him more instinctively than with any hope of answer, and as the words passed her lips, they rung hollow and despairing in her own ears.

What was her surprise to see the eyes open.

"Maud? but I know it is you," said a very feeble voice.

She was almost afraid to speak, to believe even the evidence of her own senses, but, sure enough, there was the light of reason in the wistful, wan face, now turned towards her.

Mrs. Benham wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, but Maud did not dare so much as

look at her ; nor did she say another word, but went quietly on with her usual duties till Julian was laid back upon his pillow.

He seemed inclined to sleep, and Maud crept towards the door. She closed it softly after her and flew down stairs, through the deserted dining-room, still redolent with the fumes of dinner and of wine, across the hall, into the drawing-room.

Mr. and Mrs. Murray, Colonel Kennedy, and Herbert, were all there.

“ Eh ? what, what ? ” said her uncle, hastily rousing up from his slumbers.

“ Julian,” was the only word Maud could enunciate, but the expression of her face was enough.

They would all have crowded into the sick room, without heeding her words of caution, and if Paton would have allowed it. But no ! he was firm at all events ; and Colonel Kennedy, on beating a retreat, observed, “ they should have had to cross the fellow’s dead body to gain access to his master’s room, which would have been neither convenient nor pleasant.”

Next morning Maud was at her usual post. The invalid had been very quiet all night, and now, though perfectly conscious, seemed to have neither the power, still less the will to speak.

Mr. White had paid his customary visit; his fiat had alone been wanting to confirm the sudden change from abject despair to lively hope, but, none the less, he rather threw cold water on Colonel Kennedy's boisterous effervescence of delight.

"It does not do to holloa till we are well out of the wood," was his terse remark to Herbert, who, as the most composed and cool of the party, was the most frequent recipient of his pithy sayings.

About noon, Julian spoke again.

"Maud, I never see any of the family but yourself. What has become of my uncle?"

"He was outside the door just now," was the perfectly true response, though the evasion rather smote on Maud's tender conscience, and she added, a little hurriedly:—"Uncle Murray has been backwards and forwards every five minutes this morning."

A sigh of weariness, and then another long pause. Maud was careful to avoid exciting him by conversation. It was enough, she thought, if she answered all his questions, and quite a quarter of an hour had passed ere he began again.

"Was Herbert here this morning?"

“ Yes, and last night, too.”

“ In this room ?” It was very difficult to him, in truth; to discern between the wanderings of his fancy, and the real and genuine facts of the days that had passed all unheeded.

The sight of Paton, who, though present, had not dared come in view till now, seemed to confirm some of Julian’s impressions.

“ I know there is some one I ought to thank ; I know some one who has watched me night and day,” repeated he, “ when I hardly knew whether I was in this world or the other.”

Paton’s eyes, as well as his master’s, were fixed on Maud ; but the smile into which his grave face had relaxed, departed quicker than it came, when Captain Murray had finished his sentence.

It was now Maud’s turn to speak, and doing so she rose. “ I am going to exert my authority over you now,” said she, very gently ; “ we must have no more talking yet. Mr. White is coming again presently, and he has promised Uncle Murray he shall come in if only you are not feverish again. Sick people should have no wills of their own ;” and in this aphorism Julian was content to acquiesce, for he noticed nobody else, though Mrs. Benham, Percival, and Herbert, each in succession, entered


the room ; but he was content to lie with closed eyes, or, if he opened them for a moment, to let them rest with a satisfied, happy expression on the little figure, who sat working in the distance, with a narrow ray of light from the still darkened windows, making, to his wavering fancy, a sort of glory round her head.



CHAPTER XVII.

" After long storms and tempests overblown,
The sunne at length his joyous face doth cleare ;
So when as fortune all her spight had shewne,
Some blissful hours at last must needs appear ;
Else should afflicted wights oft-times dispaire."

Faerie Queene.

S Julian gained strength—a very slow and tedious process—he began to show himself in the light of a very spoilt child ; not that Maud thought him so, but he did not choose to take his medicines from any hand but hers, and it almost seemed as though he were not satisfied, whoever else was with him, if she, too, were not present. The visits of inquiry she duly paid him before breakfast, and the last at night, which brought her to his bedside with a composing draught, always found him expecting and wishing for her ; and if she were a little longer downstairs than usual, or later, even

by five minutes, in making her appearance when he expected her, he always must needs ask the reason. Indeed, it happened more than once, when Maud had been detained by Mrs. Murray, that Paton pursued her, and, opening the door with his usual solemn air, announced: "Captain Murray did not feel quite so well, would Miss Bingley step up-stairs?"

The first time this occurred, Mrs. Murray was frightened, the next—when Maud was arranging the flowers in the boudoir—she exclaimed peevishly: "How tiresome men are when they are ill! but I suppose you must go, as Julian is so fanciful and nervous; but if you take my advice you won't indulge him too much."

On another occasion Mr. Murray smiled grimly.

"He's a troublesome fellow, eh, Maud?"

But no, Maud did not find her patient at all too exacting. She had been well broken in by Edgeworth's fretful irritability when ill, and she was happier in devoting herself to Julian, than she had been since she came to Bankside. She was of use to some one; she had an interest to occupy her, and it was pleasant to tend him, for whatever she did, Julian thought "best done;" and when, at the end of three weeks, Captain Murray left his bed,

his attentive nurse was looking better and brighter than she had done for months before.

When the time came for getting up, Julian proved more ill than anybody had anticipated. He could not walk across the room, and after an hour spent on the sofa, was glad to let Paton almost carry him back to bed again. Going down stairs was out of the question, so the large spare room opposite was made into a sitting room for him, where it was not difficult to persuade Maud to bear him company the livelong day.

So long as Julian was contented and amused, no one concerned themselves as to the future. It was looked on as a matter of course that Maud should devote herself to him, and, in making a convenience of her niece, Mrs. Murray completely laid aside all her former caution, and, with her usual selfishness, forgot the probable result of such communion, made up of the dangerously sweet ingredients of entire trust and confidence, sympathy and dependence.

If they had their drawbacks, those were very happy days. The only pity was they could not last for ever. Why they should not, was a question beginning faintly to be mooted down in the secret depths of Julian Murray's heart; but to which, as

yet, he returned no very definite answer. Maud never asked herself—never thought what was the feeling with which she regarded him. Circumstances did not bring the knowledge home to her; it was enough for her that Julian grew more knit to her day by day, enough that each passing hour brought its peculiar joys with it; and what could be pleasanter than the long summer afternoons, when she would read aloud to him, hour after hour, as he lay on the sofa by the open window, or the evenings when, as she sat at work, he would talk to her of all his plans and projects, and lead her on to speak in her turn of her old home, and all its dearly loved inmates and interests?

Julian was by no means perfection, nor was the moral atmosphere of his home such as to develope any very high standard of excellence, or to lead him to sift closely his own motives and principles of action; yet nature withal had bestowed on him a very kindly and unselfish spirit, and, in the dearth of all womanly tenderness and sympathy, Maud soon came to confide entirely in him. The story of the sad winter, which had ended with her mother's death, was all poured into his ears; *he* did not refuse to listen, and, almost to her own surprise, Maud found herself detailing griefs, and

speaking of sorrows, which, in expression, lost their tinge of bitterness. Even Arthur's absence seemed more bearable, now she had some one with whom to look forward to the period of his return ; and as for Herbert's project of eventually carrying her off to India, that soon ceased to loom as a dread alternative in the distance ; the walls of that castle in the air soon fell beneath the shafts of Julian's ridicule. He spoke with jesting, yet very tender flattery.

"What an idea ! I can't allow that, Maud. Well, two years is a long time ; but all I can say is, he is very welcome to carry you off if he can persuade you to go with him, and that is treating him with more leniency than he deserves for thinking of such a thing. It's so like the fellow, isn't it, Maud ? I suppose he fancies nobody in the world cares for you, but himself."

And one of Maud's brightest smiles would be her sole reply. She did not always care to meet Julian's eyes, which were wont to say a good deal more than even his words implied.

Little wonder was it that in reading Queechy or Cyrilla, Guy and Rupert, always found for Maud their impersonification in her attentive auditor on the sofa. "A Lost Love" made her actually un-

happy. Poor Georgie! she quite identified herself with her, and yet James Erskine, as times went, was by no means a satisfactory hero. She was comforted, however, when Julian said: "Depend on it, Maud, if Erskine could have lived his life over again, Constance would have had no chance the second time, Georgie would have had it all her own way."

Poor Maud! her former favourites, "The Heir of Redcliffe," and "Heartsease," which she had so enjoyed reading to her mother, did not thrust close enough home to please now. "Sir Guy was so very young, Arthur so dreadfully selfish."

Nevertheless, when it came to the death of the former, Julian was obliged to take the book out of her hand, and read on till she had recovered her composure.

These two works made a great impression upon him. The religious tone pervading every page was so real and genuine, that they made more impression on him than the most studied argument, or best grounded appeal. Julian was thoughtful and contemplative after every day's reading, and the result was the beginning of some conversation on the one subject in which Maud had not, as yet, found the reciprocity of feeling she would fain hope must exist.

"I admire, Maud, but I cannot emulate all these good people," sighed Julian. "I only wish I could. If I had been differently brought up—"

"Do not think of what might have been, but what is," was the low-toned response. She was wishing to say something more forcible, when Julian's thoughts took a fresh turn.

"Sinner if I am, I never should neglect my wife as Arthur did."

Maud did not immediately answer.

"What do you think about it, Maud?"

"I had rather be loved and ill-used, than descend to that polite indifference, which has no feeling in it, either of love or hate," was the somewhat inconsistent reply.

Julian looked earnestly at her, and it was a little time before he spoke again.

"Would you marry a man who did not profess to be religious, Maud? who, in short, was no better than his neighbours?"

Maud flushed up in a moment.

"I have never been asked to marry anyone yet?" she said.

It was so naively spoken, that Julian could not keep back a smile.

"That is no reason such a contingency should never arise, rather the reverse."

She did not speak.

"I want an answer to my first question," persisted he.

She just glanced up at him, and saw that he was in earnest. "I should be grieved if I thought anyone I cared for did not wish to become better," she began, tremulously. "I do not know who dare profess to be religious, but we can all try to do what is right."

Julian raised himself eagerly on his elbow, but what he was about to say did not find utterance, for the door opened, and Mr. Murray thrust in his head.

"Eh! Julian, how are you? better to-day? no pain in the side, eh?"

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Murray were very fond of bearing Julian company, even now that there was nothing in his state to shock or to alarm. They had that vague horror of illness, and its accessories, which is the natural result of egotism and self-indulgence—two qualities unhappily not entirely confined either to the worldly or unthinking, but the plague-spot of many a religious professor. How

these can reconcile such practice with the self-denying service claimed by the Master they profess to follow, is a matter which must be left between themselves and their God.

Mr. Murray daily looked in, and went through the same formula of inquiry on his return from London. If the afternoon were wet and gloomy, and he could not amuse himself in either garden or grounds, he would stay, perhaps, ten minutes ; but he never sat, nor seemed to recollect that, pacing up and down in heavy, creaking shoes, displacing furniture, and touching every object which attracted his notice, was anything but a soothing process to a patient tormented by headaches, and but slowly recovering from brain fever.

Julian bore it bravely. He would not let his uncle see he was fidgetted ; but he was not so considerate to Mrs. Murray's rustling silks and fluttering skirts ; when she appeared and he was not well, there would be a regular war of words, " Crinoline and fashion, versus comfort and figure," was a never-ending source of amicable argument ; but it was not always in a placable humour that Mrs. Murray came, and then she would sit in an arm-chair, and do nothing but yawn during the half hour which she allotted to a duty visit to the

invalid, before the time when the carriage came round.

"My wife shall never drink sherry by the pint," said Julian, half pettishly, on one of these occasions, when head and chest were both at fault. "I'd rather she should rouge at once, than have her grow fat, fussy, and red in the face."

"Mrs. Julian Murray must be made to order, I begin to think," was the half shy, half mocking retort of the young lady, who, after the manner of her sex, was busily manufacturing carriage-wheels on cambric.

"I don't know that," was the emphatic rejoinder.

"Why, she is expected to be quite perfection, mind and manners, to say nothing of colouring and complexion."

"I hope she will not think it essential to eat two dinners and two breakfasts per diem, to say nothing of half feeds between whiles," laughed Julian, who was never so well pleased as when discussing the requirements and perfections of that problematical being—his wife.

Maud smiled, but a sigh came after.

"Let me tell you, Maud," remarked he, more seriously, "a real, true woman does all things well.

Old or ugly, fat or thin, she is still loveable ; time cannot rob her of the grace and sweetness, which descends like dew on all she says or does. More, I have come to believe that, grey and wrinkled, such a being may be as near and dear to her husband's heart, as in the freshest, fairest days of youth."

Maud was silent awhile. Then she said gravely :

" I do not think it right in me ; but I never wish to live to old age. It must be so sad to feel youth, and hope, and interests, fade out and die."

" That is not like you, Maud," returned Julian. " Besides, remember the tie between husband and wife lasts for ever. Is there no happiness in growing old in company of the being dearest to you in the world ?"

" Hand joined in hand, yes," was the low-voiced reply ; " but desolate and alone."

" Do not forebode evil fortune," said Julian. " You have had tribulation enough, I know ; but I prophesy that the happiest days of your life are yet to come. And," continued he, in a lighter tone, " twenty years hence there will be big girls and bigger boys, perhaps, whom you will wish to see grow up, and take their place in life."

Such words made pleasant music in a heart only too well attuned to the rhythm of love, affection,

and soft domestic joys. A sweet, alluring picture was that he drew, to be reflected back in waking dreams, and, as it took a tangible form, to sink deeper yet into a nature of extreme sensibility, and endowed with that unlimited capacity for suffering, which unfortunately exists in those women, who love the longest, the best, and the truest.



CHAPTER XVIII.

"Life now is life—'tis bliss indeed—

A scene of fascination ;

And eyes that weep, and hearts that bleed,
Seem spots on the creation.

We think that every coming day

Will still be calmer—brighter ;

That Hope's gay wings will grow more gay,
And Life's light chain still lighter."

DUNCAN GRANT.

HERBERT had been very little at Bankside since the crisis of Julian's illness. It was not for lack of asking, for Mr. Murray bade him come as often and for as long as he chose, and he was one who meant what he said ; Julian, too, had scrawled two or three lines more than once, pressing him to pay Bankside a visit, if he only stayed for a single night. But Herbert was spell-bound, and could not tear himself from the fascinating presence of his enchantress.

Maud had long letters from him perpetually; epistles, which, it must be confessed, were more prolix than pleasing, and very difficult to return in kind.

She was sitting, pen in hand, one morning, hesitating and debating with an anxious countenance what answer she should return, when Julian, who had been immersed for the last hour in the Times, caught sight of some five sheets in her brother's handwriting.

"Herbert sends you lengthy letters enough, I must say, Maud."

"He does, indeed," was the reply, given in rather a disconsolate tone.

"Is he making up his plans for carrying you off by the next mail, may I ask?" was the next question. "The first time I saw him he told me he should certainly go out again in a month or two."

"He will not leave England this autumn, I am very sure," returned Maud. "Indeed, I should not wonder if he remained at home altogether."

"Is that what you are sighing over?" inquired Julian, with affected gravity.

"Not exactly;" but the smile which accompanied the words soon died away.

“ Herbert has renounced the idea of returning to India this autumn, and probably he may not leave England at all, *ergo*, he must of necessity throw up his commission. Has anybody left him a fortune? or is he going to marry an heiress? Come, Maud, speak up.”

“ I am afraid there is not much chance of any such good fortune, though somebody did tell me one day, Sir Cuthbert Fielding was likely to make Herbert his heir.”

“ ‘ Somebody ’ gave the reins to his imagination then,” remarked Julian. “ To my certain knowledge there is a Lady Fielding of humble parentage, with a whole host of children, great and small, down in Scotland, who will have all the old man’s rupees after his death, though he does not choose to parade his follies before the world in his lifetime. I wonder Kennedy was not better informed.”

“ It was not Colonel Kennedy, but a very different person, who suggested the notion to me; and it sounded so improbable, that, from that time to this, I have not thought about it,” and tearing up one letter, Maud began another.

That shared the same fate, and a fresh beginning was made, and then the pen rested idle in the

pretty fingers, and Maud again fell into meditation.

She was soon roused by Julian's rising from his sofa.

"Do you want anything that I can get you?" and she was on the alert in a moment.

He came feebly up to the table where she was writing, and drew a chair in beside her.

"I want to be told what is the matter. What has gone amiss to-day?" said he, trying to catch her eye.

"Nothing," was the prompt reply; "at least, nothing that I need care about really," was the more truthful amendment.

"But you do care, as a very tell-tale face informs me," persisted Julian. "And, be it a great matter or a small, I should like to hear all about it."

"There is not much to tell; only Herbert urges me one way, and my own wishes tend the other," said Maud, hesitatingly.

"If it were me, I would rather abide by your judgment, than Herbert's."

A flush of the prettiest pink came into the softly rounded cheek, which was half turned aside. Perhaps Captain Murray felt he had spoken too

strongly, perhaps some other feeling clamoured for a hearing; whichever it was, he pushed his chair back, and, taking up Maud's pretty gold penknife, began to destroy the quill with which she had been writing.

A silence followed; that, and a reserve which seemed to be creeping over him like a cloud, won for Julian a confidence, he might otherwise have had some trouble in attaining.

"Read that," and Maud laid a highly-scented note before him. It was written in a pretty, lady-like hand, and Julian looked at the broken seal, and examined the hieroglyphics, which passed as initials, before he opened it.

"I never fancy people who use Patchouli," was his sole remark, as he finally proceeded to take the note out of the envelope.

His countenance altered as he read it, but he only said: "Do you want to go, Maud?"

She shook her head emphatically.

"Why not?"

"I know so little of Lady Louis Crichton, besides—"

"Besides what? I will make it all smooth with Mrs. Murray, if that is what you are afraid of. You have never been to a ball in your life, and a

little bird tells me there is a very pretty, becoming dress all ready up-stairs, which would have come into play by this time, if I had not broken my head. And Maud," proceeded Julian, "if I give you leave of absence, will you promise to come back at the end of the week? I can't spare you for longer, and I hope you know it is very unselfish of me to let you go at all."

Her countenance brightened in a moment, and he apparently found it very satisfactory to watch the changes, which reflected themselves in her face, as clearly as clouds and sunshine on a lake.

"All I want is to stay quietly at home," said she.

"Do you know, half the young ladies in London would give their ears—metaphorically I mean, not literally—to go to this ball, which you don't appear to care about?" said he, with a pleased smile.

"Then Lady Louis Crichton can take somebody else."

"Of course she can, but she wants you; in which she shows her sensé. Now, Maud, without prevarication, yes or no, stay or go?"

"No, a thousand times no, as far as I only am concerned," said Maud, "but perhaps I ought, if—"

“ ‘As’ and ‘if’ are two little words which imply a great deal. You have not made a clean breast of your troubles yet, Maud, I know, by your way of speaking.”

“Herbert so wishes me to accept this invitation,” pleaded Maud.

“If it is you personally he craves to see, let him come here. If he only wants you to help him, you may as well stay to please me.”

“I don’t doubt which I prefer doing,” returned Maud; “but I am afraid that is hardly a safe rule of conduct.”

“I suspect how it is,” interposed Julian; “Herbert is in love with Lady Louis Crichton, and your being with her would give him the run of her house. Take my advice, Maud, and keep out of it, no good comes of meddling in other people’s love affairs.

‘He either fears his fate too much,
Or his desert is small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,
And win or lose it all.’

Let Herbert alone; if he can’t manage his own business, he does not deserve success.”

Maud was silent. She was more than half afraid she might have betrayed the secret, her brother had so strictly charged her to keep.

"Herbert is a very handsome fellow," said Julian, meditatively; "but I don't think it is on the cards for Lady Louis to marry him. What is your real opinion, Maud?"

"I have not made up my mind. I do not know enough of Lady Louis Crichton. You thought she encouraged Herbert when they were here together," returned Maud, who believed herself to be quite safe, as long as she dealt in generalities.

"She is a good deal sought after, and might have married again before this," continued Julian, following up his own train of ideas. "Take it all in all, I begin to think if Herbert has the chance, he will be a very lucky fellow; she is a coquette now, but the chances are she will steady down with marriage."

"I really must write my letters," interrupted Maud; "but I do not think I can go, even though Herbert wishes it."

"I don't see the necessity; you can write a nice civil sort of letter, and don't refuse that general invitation which is tacked on in the post-script. Say you are very sorry, but next week it is out of your power to leave home; put it formally, and then add something pleasant as to your regret at Lady Louis Crichton's visit here having

been cut short so unexpectedly. That is the way of the world, Maud."

"She will think me very self-important and busy," laughed Maud, as she proceeded to obey.

"Never mind! do as I bid you. There is no need to be 'numble' like Uriah Heep. Mankind in general always take us at our own valuation, so it is a pity not to avail oneself of the one amiable weakness of humanity."

"I shall not be able to get off as easily with Herbert, I am afraid," remarked Maud, as she concluded a note, which Julian decided would do well enough.

"Don't write to Herbert at all; he will do very well without a letter for once," was her counsellor's cool advice.

"I must, or he will be going up to the Paddington Station to-morrow to meet me," was her answer.

"Give me the pen," said Julian.

"But what are you going to say?" asked Maud, in some perturbation.

"Nothing but the truth," rejoined Julian. "I shall just tell him that I have advised you to say nothing of this invitation to my aunt, as this does not happen to be a very favourable juncture for

making a request. You were in disgrace this morning, Maud, you know. I heard it all from my window. Moreover, I shall add that I am not sorry you have consented to give it up, as I should miss you terribly, being very shaky still. Have you anything to say against that?"

A blush, a smile, and a negative gesture.

"And if I say you are writing to Lady Louis, it will be all serene, and Herbert will be happy in the belief she is getting six pages instead of himself. Now that is all settled; I am satisfied, and I hope you are, Maud."

She was little likely to dispute any dictum which fell from his lips; preference and prudence ranked themselves on the same side. Instinct warned her Lady Louis Crichton was not a friend to be relied on; and, with all her affection for Herbert, Maud had little faith in his discretion or judgment.

Her decision was made and past recall; yet Maud was restless and ill-at-ease all that afternoon. A vague feeling of depression, a heaviness of spirit, hardly justified by the occasion, was on her; and an indefinite sense of coming ill, for which she could assign no cause, weighed upon both heart and spirits. She wished to be alone—

alone with her own thoughts; but when she had gained the solitude of her room she could not rest there, and came down again in hope of finding solace in companionship; but companionship she was not to have, unless it were that of her own vagrant fancies, for strange voices fell on her ears ere she reached the sitting-room, and Paton, whom she met on the stairs, told her his master had visitors; Sir George Vanston and Mr. Grey had come over from Hounslow to inquire.

He seemed to expect she would do the honours of the luncheon, Captain Murray had ordered in the dining-room; but Maud's courage was not equal to the encounter; and, rather than run the risk of being sent for, she hastened away, nor paused till she found herself safe in an unfrequented nook of the shrubbery, whence she could watch the road leading up to the Great Park; and there she sat, longing for the departure of the gentlemen, wondering why they came, and thinking of anything, rather than permit herself to look down into the innermost recesses of a heart, which fluttered, and beat, and longed for protection, shelter, and a sure resting-place.

Had Maud been less utterly inexperienced, she would have understood her own state of mind

better, have recognized at once that she had entered upon that debatable land, which lies between the fairy isle of love, and the cold, work-a-day world. The confines of these countries truly are not clearly marked ; and on the female side at least, the shades of colour, which part intimacy from affection, and affection from passion, are so closely blended, as to be well-nigh imperceptible. As it was, the kind of disquietude to which she was beginning to be the prey taught her nothing, nor did she ever associate it in the most remote degree with the mastery which in thought, feeling, and opinion, Julian had come to exercise over her. She accepted his guidance ; one by one she was casting at his feet her trust, her will, her youth, her love, her worship ; in all faith making the perilous venture, nor for a moment dreaming that her " god was one of clay."

Captain Murray was not in a state of mind or body to enjoy the company of his *soi-disant* friends, and before the afternoon was ended he was quite overdone ; and when Mrs. Murray came in from her drive, the military fraternity were forthwith transferred to her for entertainment. Maud would have been glad to escape them altogether ; and when at last, in despair of their departure, and in

the extremity of her restlessness, she made her way home by a circuitous path, she heard voices in the flower-garden, and laughter in the billiard-room.

She had no garrison-town associations with the clinking of spurs and clanging of sabres, so she wended her way to a quarter of the house, where she knew she should be welcome. Julian was too tired to talk, but he exerted himself to ask whether she had seen Vanston and Grey; he had sent Paton to look for her everywhere; still he was anything but displeased when she flatly refused to go down and make herself agreeable; and in soothing him into a state of quiescence, Maud got quit for the time of her own mental fever.

The two gentlemen were invited to stay to dinner, so at least Percival informed Miss Bingley at dressing-time, and furthermore she brought a message from Mrs. Murray, begging she would wear her black lace dress.

Maud was surprised, but obedient; and yet more astonished to find when she went down that she was exalted for the nonce into a heroine. Mrs. Murray was telling Sir George Vanston that she had saved her from a very dangerous illness, brought on by the shock of Julian's accident; and

had been, besides, of great use in giving advice about Julian. These deeds were presented and dwelt on in an inverse ratio, as regarded veracity; however this version, if not altogether correct, was highly complimentary, only Maud would rather not have been praised at all, and certainly felt no pleasure in commendations not justified by facts.

Whatever he thought about it, Sir George Vanston never ceased to stare at Miss Bingley. He was good-looking and rich, two points duly appreciated, no doubt, by himself, possibly by others; certainly they were the sole ground-work on which he depended for success in society, seeing that his conversation was vapid and inane to a degree. Maud thought him very stupid, and she had good opportunity of judging, for on her he turned the whole battery of his small talk, Mrs. Murray being apparently quite taken up all through dinner with what Mr. Grey was saying to her; Mr. Murray being in the sort of humour when he vouchsafed not a single word to either of his guests, from the moment they sat down till the ladies left the dining-room.

"Don't stay up stairs, Maud," said Mrs. Murray, staying her as she was going to ascend. "I want

you to help entertain these men, I dare say they will go up and see Julian, so he will hardly want you."

Maud's music certainly helped off the dull evenings at Bankside wonderfully. She had hardly touched the piano since Julian's illness, but to-night she was kept at it. Sir George Vanston's one gift was a musical ear; he knew more of the science of the art than Maud herself; and on whatever subject a man is well-informed, be it what it may, he seldom or ever speaks foolishly. Altogether, the evening, though Mr. and Mrs. Murray, Mr. Grey, and a dummy played at whist, was not quite so tedious as had been the hours of dinner.

Herbert's answer came, mild and placid enough; Lady Louis Crichton had been sufficiently disappointed at not seeing his sister, or had expressed herself so, for him to see therein good grounds for renewed hope; and upon that part of his letter which he heard, Julian propounded a new idea.

"I say, Maud, Lady Louis Crichton generally goes to the Isle of Wight when other people do, and if she were to ask you down there, it would not be so much amiss. Ryde is not a bad place

in August or September, when there is yachting going on."

"But I do not want to leave home," said Maud,

"Nor I, and for a month to come at least I do not mean to move," resumed Julian; "but White talks of sending me to the sea. Madame does not like the idea; I sounded her upon it yesterday, so there would be no use in urging my uncle to transfer the whole establishment to some lively marine retreat; but if I am supposed to require change from a sick room, I am sure you ought to have it too, Maud. You are quite as much a prisoner as I am."

"I have had so much pain and suffering to go through," said she, archly.

"I know one thing," said Julian; "you never think of yourself; and in this house if nobody sees to it, you are not very likely to be considered."

"Julian, you must not talk in that way."

"I will not if it displeases you. I only wish to remark that if I am silent, I have the grace to know and feel who defers to my pleasure, and indulges my most selfish vagaries; and, what is more, if I can help it, Maud, you shall never be so desolate and wretched again, as you were when you first came to Bankside."

"Things and people were alike strange," said she, apologetically; "and it is to be hoped that I shall be wiser in future."

"And not water so many pocket-handkerchiefs with tears, as Percival tells me was the case. Percival is very communicative, and makes herself very agreeable sometimes, I assure you, Maud."

"Then, perhaps, she may tell me what you mean to do about sea air." She did not intend her voice to falter, she thought she spoke quite cheerfully.

"I mean Lady Louis to ask you to stay with her at Ryde or Cowes, as the case may be," said Julian, who knew exactly what would restore his companion's gaiety; "and just as it happens, I shall go to the hotel at either place. There I shall be under your orders, Maud, and not run any of those risks old White talks of."

"I had certainly rather go to the sea with Lady Louis, than stay with her in London," said Maud.

"Yes, I think we might make out two or three weeks very pleasantly," said Julian; "particularly if Lady Louis has Herbert to play pretty for."

"She might ask Mr. and Mrs. Murray," remarked Maud.

"No, they spent a week with her once, and,

somehow or other, they never go anywhere a second time."

"But so often as Lady Louis Crichton is invited here," urged Maud.

"My dear Maud, let me tell you one thing," said Julian, with an affectation of speaking sentimentally; "when you never go out to stay without a man, a maid, two dogs, a bullfinch, and a husband, and, moreover, are discontented because you expect to partake of pleasures, which belong neither to your position or years, then you must make up your mind not to be offended if you are not asked again."

Julian was severe. Mrs. Murray's selfishness provoked him infinitely; he had never seen it come into play in all its full force before. More or less it affected every member of the household, and above all Maud was especially subject to its influence; but the last month had won for her a very different position from that, which she had been in on her first arrival. She had earned it for herself, and, if his wife did not, Mr. Murray fully appreciated the calm decision and unshrinking energy, Maud had exhibited, at the most critical juncture of Julian's illness. He had not expected it of her, whom he had been wont to look on as

nothing more than an over-refined, pretty, delicate girl, half afraid to speak, and shrinking alike from self-assertion or notice. The clear, practical common-sense she had shown, took the hard-headed old Scotchman quite by surprise ; he had not expected it from her mother's daughter, nor, indeed, was there any precedent in those of the Edgeworth blood he was best acquainted with, for the entire self-abnegation, and steady perseverance, with which Maud had entered on duties, which, whatever they were now, had certainly not at first been a labour of love.

From that time forward, Mr. Murray always contrived to catch the tenor of any small remark Maud made at dinner, and never contradicted her, even though the opinion she expressed might be in direct contradistinction to his own. He was not demonstrative, it was not in his nature ; and it was not then, no, nor till long after, that Maud arrived at the knowledge of the hold she had gained upon that piece of bodily mechanism, that sentient organ, which Mr. Murray kept so fast locked and closed, where the mind has its sway, and which men call a heart.

Henceforth Maud's life ceased to be one of utter moral starvation ; Mrs. Murray even relented in

her favour; she did not lavish the affection and encomiums upon her, which were awarded to the spaniel which stood on its hind legs, or the "Bully" which perched on her finger, but she treated her niece like a human being. She exhibited no sympathy, and felt not the slightest interest in Maud's past, present, or future, but she liked to talk to her about herself, to recal her own experience, and to propound all the ideas and schemes, which filled and occupied her fertile brain, and in which she kindly allowed Maud to take a subordinate share. It was egotism certainly, and egotism, too, of the most worldly kind and degree; but egotism that claims sympathy is the one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.

Maud was of an affectionate, loving nature, and opened her heart readily, in return for any small kindnesses which fell to her lot; but there was one person who, do or say what he would, grew more and more repellant to her. Colonel Kennedy would have liked very well to "make friends with mademoiselle," as he expressed it, but whether it were the manner or the man which offended, the result was the same. Maud could not endure him, and, not being at all well versed in the grand lesson of society, which teaches that the best and

most conventional cloak for dislike is an unswerving civility, and an overstrain of politeness, she showed pretty plainly what she felt. Intimacy with Colonel Kennedy meant familiarity, and at every advance he made, Maud drew further and further back into her shell.

Julian told her "it was no use to ride the high horse with Kennedy, she must take him as she found him, he meant no harm, it was only manner, &c. &c." but secretly he was delighted to see Maud could hold her own, and stand upon her womanly dignity.

It was on this sort of occasion that Mrs. Murray's conduct was most irritating to Maud. She did not mind her exactions on her own account, but it was galling in the extreme to be bid to add sugar and cream to the coffee, Colonel Kennedy could very well pour out for himself, or to be sent into the garden to gather a rose or geranium for his coat. She obeyed—she would have thought herself equally degraded either by contention or refusal—but it was with the proud air of an unwilling slave; she never addressed him, never would condescend to accept at his hands any of those small courtesies, which man ordinarily pays to woman.

He, on his part, admired her none the less, that

on these occasions she treated him with a quiet superciliousness very like scorn, and kept him at such a distance, that neither, by word or look, did he dare express an atom of the sympathy he really felt in her annoyance.

It was quite a relief to her when he was hastily summoned to attend the death-bed of a relation, and Bankside was free for a time from his repeated and reiterated visits.



CHAPTER XIX.

" — A time, when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light;
The glory and the freshness of a dream! "

WORDSWORTH.

" E'en Providence itself conspires
With man and nature against love,
As pleased to couple cross desires,
And cross where they themselves approve."

The Angel in the House.



MAUD," said Julian, one glorious July evening, when Mr. and Mrs. Murray had just set out to dine some eight miles off with a Dowager of quality, " Maud, why should we not take a quiet drive, and, like our great progenitors, enjoy the cool of the evening? "

" I do not think there is time to-night," rejoined Maud, who was not good at feigned excuses.

" How long do you want to be out? it is barely

six yet, and if we drive till eight, I think I shall have made a good beginning."

"But, Julian, you are not strong enough to drive; really you are not," urged Maud, with a frightened face.

"I am not going in the phaeton, so you need not look so scared. Besides, you may set your mind at ease, the four-footed individual who helped me to my broken head expiated his offence with his life, and his accomplice was sold at Tattersall's, without my consent or connivance, while I lay sick in my bed. I may thank Kennedy for that."

"It's the best thing I ever heard of his doing," laughed Maud.

"I believe you," retorted Julian, "the more so, as I have a strong conviction that the Colonel bought him himself, and has got him hid up somewhere, thinking I shall not recognize him when he brings him out as a new purchase, clipped, or with a hog mane and tail. It's a hard case, Maud; here have I lost a hundred and fifty pounds by that transaction—a costly price for a week's work—been bled and leeches within an inch of my life, and into the bargain have to make it square with old White for medicine and attendance."

"He deserves anything," was the warm response;

"he kept you alive when I had quite begun to despair."

"He had a capital coadjutor, and one, too, who does not threaten me with going into a consumption on the smallest indiscretion. But come! you have done tea this quarter of an hour, Maud; run up-stairs, and put on that knowing straw hat."

"But my bonnet is best for the brougham."

"The brougham! what are you dreaming of? I'm not come to that yet; do as I bid you, and then, perhaps, you will be rewarded by the sight of Cinderella's coach."

The grey hat with its long feather, which had unaccountably appeared in Maud's room one morning, after Percival had indulged in twenty-four hours' leave of absence, was soon put on, and by the time she made her appearance, Julian was standing switching his whip upon the doorstep, looking curiously down the coach-road.

"It's my belief," said he, eyeing her complacently, "that Kennedy must have sent that hat, as a trifling token of esteem upon his departure; he always knows what fine ladies' fashions are."

"If I thought so I should never wear it," was the indignant answer.

"Don't quarrel with your bread and butter,

Maud, but look here." Paton was seen approaching, heading a procession consisting of the whole available strength of the stables, clustering round a miniature basket-carriage, drawn by the fattest, sleekest, and slyest of Shetland ponies.

"I think you and I may venture to enjoy this toy without fear of broken bones," was Julian's dry remark, as he handed Maud in. "This little beggar is too plethoric to play tricks, I suspect."

"Where did it come from?" asked Maud, in delight.

"I should fancy from the same place where they built your hat. I never ask questions, but I dare say Percival picked up the whole turn-out in London. She told me she had a great many commissions to do."

That was the first of many pleasant drives; there was not a glade in Windsor Great Park, nor a dell where the tall ferns grew, and the red deer couched, that was not explored. They did not care for the Long Walk, and the cockney drives by Virginia Water, or through the forest, which Mrs. Murray and the barouche were wont to frequent; but by favour of the park-keepers, and the absence of her Majesty, they made their way into the most sacred recesses of the green rides.

Maud played the part of charioteer after the first time or two. Julian persisting that it tired him to hold the reins, and it was not disagreeable to take lessons in the art of coachmanship under a master who, if particular, was always patient.

"Animals are much wiser in their generation than human beings," said Julian, one day, when they had driven round by the royal paddocks, and were standing up to admire the brood-mares and their foals feeding quietly in the green, sunny enclosures.

"Why so?" asked Maud, wonderingly.

"Because they follow the bent of their natural instincts. I don't speak of horses; unfortunately for the equine race they partake of our over-civilization to such an extent that, poor things! they have no natural feeling left, save the love of their young. I was envying the birds and beasts who owe nothing to man," and Julian actually sighed.

Maud looked up inquiringly into his face.

"Yes," continued he, "they neither regret the past, nor look to the future, and, as the natural consequence, are quite happy in the present."

"So might we be, if only we would," rejoined Maud; "don't you remember the motto prefixed

to the title-page of Longfellow's *Hyperion*? 'Look not mournfully into the past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear, and with a manly heart.'"

"True, at least in theory," was the unhesitating rejoinder; "but in practise, whether I will or no, I am tantalised by the idea, that I may be happier yet."

Maud did not say a word, and if she, too, were troubled in spirit, Donald was the only person aware of the fact, communicated, mesmerically, doubtless, through his bridle-rein.

"Now look at those wood-pigeons," continued Julian, a slight ebullition of independence on the pony's part having been quelled on the instant; "I undertake to say they neither desired, nor required anybody's consent, or connivance to their union. There was no talk about connection and settlements, nor bother about this, that, and the other, and they are quite happy in their domesticity, without caring a jot what other pigeons say or think."

"Birds are so faithful and fond, that I can scarcely believe, but that there is something as holy in their marriages, as in ours," said Maud, simply. "I like the text so much which says: 'The

sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young."

She spoke with such undoubting reverence that the antagonism warring within Julian's breast was for the moment stilled. Five minutes of silence, and then the impression wore off.

"I cannot imagine anything more miserable than for a man to wake up from a dream of love, and find he has fallen into the one irreparable error of making a wrong choice," began he again.

"It is to be hoped it is not often the case," suggested Maud. "A mistake on one side must be misery on the other."

"It is what sophisms and over-civilization lead to, depend on it," assented Julian. "Ill-assorted marriages are plenty enough, Heaven knows!" and again he sighed. "There is my uncle, who rushed into matrimony at the end of a six weeks' acquaintance. I should be sorry to emulate his domestic peace. And there is Kennedy, on the other hand—forty years old, if he is a day—who, according to his own account, has been looking all his life long for that *rara avis*, a woman perfect in mind, manners, and morals."

"And would not have recognized her had he found her ten times over," remarked Maud, quietly.

"Poor Kennedy!" retorted Julian, "whatever he may be with the sex in general, he is no favourite of yours."

"Oh! do not talk like him!" said Maud, entreatingly.

Julian laughed.

"I cannot bear to hear him cavil in the way he does at all women, and then turn round and treat those present as though they were angels," continued she. "It makes me distrust him; I cannot help fancying all are maligned in turn."

"I do not think you have much cause for fear," returned Julian. "On the contrary, I rather suspect 'Mademoiselle' stands high in the good graces of the gallant Colonel."

"I doubt it," said Maud; "and even if it were so, I am afraid I hardly appreciate the compliment."

"Don't be proud, Maud; in this wicked world nobody's good opinion is to be despised," said Julian, half jestingly. "Besides, he has a great deal of influence in his way," added he, gravely.

Maud would willingly have cavilled at the word "influence." Colonel Kennedy was always ready with his advice and opinion, asked or unasked, that she was quite ready to allow; but she did not give him credit for the tenacity of purpose, which

he really professed. Some intuitive feeling restrained the expression of her opinion; she happened to know Julian had that morning received a long letter from his absent mentor, and intuition—strange, inexplicable, and unaccountable—forced her to believe that his uneasy frame of mind, on this afternoon, had its rise in something therein contained.

“He has great influence.” She could not forget the words; they left an unpleasant impression, though she reasoned against, battled with it, and again and again, told herself such fancies were causeless, vain, and unworthy.

Meanwhile they kept her silent and meditative, and she quite started when Julian said suddenly: “Maud, you usually have a cure for everything, what is your receipt for a general feeling of uncomfortable doubt?”

“I am no example, but—”

“But what? speak out. I’m getting into a mental fever.”

“Arthur would say, ‘Have faith.’”

“Faith in what?” demanded Julian.

“Faith in yourself, in other human creatures, and, above all, in God, in God’s guidance, I mean,” was the earnest response.

"I believe you are right," returned he, after a while.

"I know this is right, if I am wrong. I may doubt and fear, and loose my hold, but the truth is still the same."

It was quite new to Julian to hear anyone speak in this strain. In his home a reference to any loftier standard, than the merest worldly maxims and policy was never heard. Even the barren acknowledgment, that this life is not the sole end and aim of creation and existence, was never made. Self-education, not for this world, but for the next; the work of life understood or undertaken; the rule of right, if falteringly accomplished, still resolutely striven after, he had never learned; nor knew anything of that strange, spiritual alchemy, which makes the weak strong, and gives to the shadowy future a substance and stability the world marvels over, yet never learns to understand.

At any other time, in all the pride of youth, health, and energy, Julian might not have regarded it. He would have been content to set Maud down as a pretty, gentle, attractive girl, somewhat more sentimental and subdued than exactly suited with his tastes; but at this particular period, Julian regarded things in a different light from that in

which he had seen them hitherto. From the calm retreat of his sick room he looked out upon the pleasures, the puerilities, and the pursuits, which had hitherto made up the summary of his life, with something of the philosophy with which a sage might watch a child's game of play. The strong holdings of custom and convention on his mind were shaken; the trammels of ambition, and amusement, of fashion and folly were loosened, and the idea that most frequently presented itself to his imagination was the same as he was always holding up before Maud's eyes, a softly-coloured picture of loving union, hallowed ties, and fond domestic hours.

Such was his reading of "a new life;" home and wife and children; an alluring faith, a reflex of a religion which took for its God the creature rather than the Creator. How it would fare with principles, which had no surer foundation, or be with an attachment which grew out of the fulness of the one heart, and the emptiness of the other, when the tide of old habits, opinions, and associations set back, remained to be seen.

Mr. and Mrs. Murray were strolling down the paddock when the pony-carriage came through the lower gate. A halloo of greeting from Julian,

and the younger pair went on their way towards the house.

"Julian is altered by his illness," began Mrs. Murray.

"I don't see it," retorted her lord and master, curtly.

"He is changed, or he would never drive about, day after day, in that little carriage, and care for no other amusement," persisted the lady.

Mr. Murray vouchsafed not a syllable in reply.

"If all his tastes are to deteriorate in the same proportion, I shall more than ever regret this unlucky accident," continued the last speaker.

Still no answer.

"I was congratulated on Julian's marriage yesterday," concluded Mrs. Murray, in the triumphant tone of one, who feels that at last a sensation must be made. "I cannot say how much it annoyed me."

"Humph?" ejaculated Mr. Murray, interrogatively, and then, finding his wife said no more, he added. "It has always been my wish that he should marry before he is thirty."

"If he were to make the marriage we should like, the sooner the better, I should say," said his wife, significantly.

"It's no use pressing it, as I have told you a hundred times, Mrs. Murray," was the fierce response. "Julian knows the advantages of the match as well as you do. How often have I begged you to let matters take their course. He will marry when he thinks proper."

"And whom he thinks proper," added Mrs. Murray, with emphasis. "And the worst part of all this driving about the country together is, that it looks as if *I* were taking advantage of circumstances, and palming off my niece upon your adopted son. Everybody is talking of it, I assure you."

"Forbid it then," said the matter-of-fact man of business, "surely you have authority enough for that."

Mrs. Murray shook her head.

"It would not do for me to speak; the better plan would be for you to give Julian a hint. One word from you would be enough; I have never known him run counter to one of your wishes."

Mrs. Murray was most cautious in her suggestions; but, to judge by Mr. Murray's knitted brows, she had given him ample and unpleasant subject for thought.

As they came up the lawn again, Julian was to

be seen lolling upon a garden-seat, and Maud flitting here and there among the flowers, while ever and again a musical laugh and a gay word broke upon the ear.

"The young people are as happy as needs be," broke out Mr. Murray, angrily. "Why must you always be looking below the surface, Mrs. Murray, and suggesting ideas that you know are unpleasant to me?"

"It's not my fault," said his wife, pettishly, "other people, see as well as I do, what will be the end of Maud and Julian being so much together."

A pause followed, which was broken by Mr. Murray's saying, in rather a mysterious tone: "I don't know what you may have observed, Sophy, but I almost fancy Julian pointedly avoids Ada Crichton."

"He is not so *empressé* about her as he was, certainly," said Mrs. Murray, mollified by this appeal to her discrimination, "still I was in hopes that when once thrown together again intimately, something might have come of it. If our Ascot party had not been so unfortunately broken up, there is no saying what might have been."

"Ada does not look her age," said Mr. Murray, as if following up his own train of thought, "and

her seniority did not seem to weigh with Julian formerly."

"There are quite enough advantages to counter-balance the difference of years, if they are on the wrong side," put in Mrs. Murray, quickly, "and I only hope that this new fancy of Julian's may not stand in the way of our wishes."

Anxiety lent quite a new expression to Mr. Murray's features, as he said: "His marriage with Ada would put an end to all difficulties about Fintore, and if it is not to be, there's no saying what may happen. She may marry some one else, who may value a landed estate more than she does, and I have always said I will not buy so long as the matter rests solely between her and me."

Mrs. Murray shook her head.

"If it were not for Julian's own advantage," began Mr. Murray, afresh.

"It will be a thousand pities, if, in a fit of romantic gratitude, he throws himself away upon a girl who does not know his value," interrupted his wife.

"Maud is a nice girl enough, and under any other circumstances—," recommenced he.

"Julian might do so much better," put in she;

"but from the moment Maud arrived, I felt how it would be."

"Maud has behaved very well, very well indeed, Mrs. Murray, since she has been with us, and I will not have you hard upon her."

It was now her turn to be silent.

"I should be sorry if the girl's feelings were concerned," continued Mr. Murray, with whom honour and probity, and a certain uprightness in all the affairs of this world, stood in the stead of any higher principles. "She is under our care, as it were, though she has brothers; Julian is a good-looking fellow," and for the first time a smile of gratified pride played about his lips.

"I should not wonder if Maud fancied herself in love with him," returned Mrs. Murray, coolly; "Julian has a very taking manner, towards ladies especially. Indeed, I hardly suppose she has ever seen anyone who is at all equal to him."

"And what about Julian himself?" asked Mr. Murray, who was disposed to bow to his wife as an authority in matters of the heart.

"He has eyes and ears for no one else at present," was the unhesitating reply, "but that is no reason it will last. He has been in love before, ay, and will be again;" continued she, lightly.

"I don't see my way out of this business, I must confess," said Mr. Murray, gravely. "It just comes to this, if it is a matter of affection, my wishes, of course, go to the wall. Julian is quite well enough off to marry as he pleases, and I can't hinder it," he added, despondingly.

"You can't forbid it, certainly, but I think you might hinder it," persisted his wife.

"Fintore is not the same place it was twenty years ago," sighed Mr. Murray. "I'll undertake to say there is not another estate north of the Tweed to be compared to it."

"Something must be done," ejaculated his wife. "Is a girl like this to step in and frustrate all our plans?"

Mr. Murray winced. He did not like to hear such ideas put into words; his sense of justice revolted against hearing Maud blamed; besides which he had an innate conviction, though he fought against it strenuously, that the marriage with Lady Louis Crichton, which it had long been his wish to promote, was hardly of a kind to secure his nephew's ultimate happiness, however much it might increase his consequence.

He remained silent, till at last, Mrs. Murray said: "It would be the worst policy in the world,

at this juncture, to set ourselves openly in opposition. Julian might fancy his honour involved, and himself pledged."

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Murray," said her spouse, testily. "First you argue one way, and then another."

The formal appellation of Mrs. Murray might fairly be taken as a gauge of Mr. Murray's humour, but his wife took his irritation quietly to-day; too much was at stake for her to afford to lose her temper; and, seeing how easily her lord and master was vanquished by any softness of manner, the thing to be wondered at was, that she so often allowed petulance to get the better of discretion.

"If Maud had a friend or relation in the world," she went on, "the thing would be to send her away on a visit, and then reason with Julian. I hope he will soon go to the sea; I think I shall give Mr. White a hint to order him change of air."

"White speaks in the highest terms of Maud. He says her able nursing tended as much to bring Julian through, as anything," said Mr. Murray, whose conscience was not quite satisfied with the part he was to act.

"Yes, yes," acquiesced his wife; "it so happens she has been accustomed to illness, and, what is

more to the point, she never contradicted Mr. White ; but Julian will not want a nurse all his days, I hope."

"Why, no," said Mr. Murray, "but I would not be unmindful of what she has done. We must consider the girl's feelings, Sophy."

It was more than the hard woman of the world, whose conversation always ran on love and lovers, was likely to do, but she was an excellent manoeuvrer.

"Julian is very dilatory," she resumed, "and I see plainly he is too content with things as they are, to be in any hurry to speak. Once separate them now, and the chances are the whole thing will pass off."

"I hope so," said Mr. Murray, gravely. "I really hope it may ; but I should be sorry to do anything unhandsome by your sister's child."

"Of course," interrupted she, "of course, it would be better not to speak to Julian, unless it was absolutely necessary. Then lay the state of the case before him, and let him judge for himself ; there can be no possible harm in that."

"And the poor girl is to take her chance," said he, half ironically, half reproachfully.

"Never mind Maud. She will get over her first love as other girls do ; a few tears, and a little sentiment, are a matter of course."

CHAPTER XX.

" They seated in the London train,
The bell rang, and, with shriek like death,
Link catching link, the long array,
With ponderous pulse and fiery breath,
Proud of its burden, swept away."

The Angel in the House.

" Farewell ! A word which must be, and hath been ;
A word which makes us linger—yet, farewell !"

Childe Harold.

IN due course of time, just as Julian had foreseen, Lady Louis Crichton wrote and asked Maud to accompany her to the Isle of Wight. Herbert brought the note of invitation himself ; and, greatly to his surprise, Mrs. Murray instantly acquiesced in an arrangement, he was rather doubtful of her allowing. She only made one condition ; Herbert should take charge of his sister up to town, and cross with her from Southampton if necessary. That seemed but natural.

Lady Louis made two propositions ; either Maud should join her without loss of time, and partake of such scant gaieties as the fag-end of the London season would enable her to offer—she could promise her an opera box one night certainly,—or else follow her to Ryde the end of the week after. Maud thought she needed the longer time for preparation ; but Mrs. Murray assured Herbert it was quite unnecessary ; she could go at once ; and Mrs. Percival was summoned into the boudoir forthwith, where Mrs. Murray lent an attentive ear to all that accomplished damsel's suggestions on the subject of Miss Bingley's wardrobe ; and, finally, her aunt carried off Maud into Windsor, to make some needful purchases.

Herbert was persuaded to pass the interim at Bankside ; and on the third evening, when Maud went up to bed, she found Percival busy with her travelling boxes.

“ Everything is finished, Miss Bingley. There is the black lace dress for the Opera, and the white roses should be worn with that.”

“ But the Ryde Ball,” suggested the young lady.

“ It ought to be pansies with the white crape, Miss Bingley, indeed it ought,” said Percival, with an earnestness worthy of a better cause.

"I will see what I can manage when I get to London," was the answer.

Maud had a natural aptitude for dress; it was with her an instinct rather than a taste; and, without any apparent striving for effect, she always chose that which, however simple, harmonized the best with her style of appearance and character. She, too, thought that pansies would be a great addition to the white crape, embroidered in the same velvety hue; but though she had gone into Windsor with a whole quarter's income in her purse, Mrs. Murray had disbursed the money so freely for her in ribbons, gloves, and trimmings, that the prospective expenses of her visit, were already beginning to be a source of anxiety to her.

She had not liked to remonstrate, for Mrs. Murray, if she had been extravagant in her behalf, had been liberal too. The above-mentioned ball-dress, and a bonnet, had both been her presents; true, the latter had been her own Ascot failure, but the former had never been put on, and was given to Maud, made, and trimmed, and finished exactly as it had come from London for her aunt's use, but it was supposed to be mourning, and was now discarded accordingly. Percival pronounced it "was

just the thing for Miss Bingley," and, with much glorification of her own skill in adapting it to the slight graceful figure, she displayed her handiwork.

"Six dresses! three for the morning, three for the evening," said she to herself, as she turned the key upon her labours, "and Lady Louis Crichton's Mamselle may find fault if she can. She caught sight of these black lace flounces the first evening my young lady wore them; they're splendid, and everything else good;" and with this comfortable reflection Mrs. Percival solaced herself while undressing Miss Bingley, who apparently gave more heed to the table of fares in Bradshaw, than to the said Percival's agreeable conversation.

That damsel, however, on retiring, found a willing auditor in Mr. Paton, then waiting outside his master's door. Him she informed, "If such things were as Miss Bingley wanted a maid of her own, she thought she had as good a chance of the place as anybody. Sincerely did she hope parties knew their own minds, and that there would be no ons and offs, for really Mrs. Murray was almost past any human being's patience."

Paton affirmed, "In that case things might be very comfortable; and that when his master was married and settled, he thought it would be time

to look out for a wife himself—not look out, no, he thought his mind was fixed, but—”

He was not destined to conclude the sentiment so admirably turned. Captain Murray called “Paton, Paton!” and Percival, seized with unwonted bashfulness, fled apace to the dormitory, where fat Mrs. Benham was already enjoying her first sleep.

The morning for departure came; Herbert could not be content to wait till after luncheon, but must needs start by noon, though the transit from Bankside to Belgravia would scarcely occupy two hours. Mrs. Murray offered the barouche; she should want it in the afternoon, and Maud had no good pretext to offer, though she had her own reasons for desiring delay, seeing that Julian had spoken of sending the dogcart with the luggage; Herbert would drive it; and then Maud could go down to the station in Cinderella’s coach, as he chose to call the pony-carriage.

He was late that morning, and Maud began to think she should be obliged to depart without bidding him good-by, for the carriage was waiting, Mr. Murray was calling to her, and Mrs. Murray actually on the stairs coming to hurry her down, before she heard Julian’s voice in the hall. He

was not dressed, as usual, in the careless and somewhat coarse costume of the country gentleman, in which Maud always thought he looked his best, and the change attracted his uncle's notice directly. Besides, Paton was brushing his master's hat.

"You off to town; eh, Julian?" said Mr. Murray, in some surprise.

"No, Sir, not to-day; only an initiatory trip as far as the station."

"Why, Julian, I thought the motion of the barouche made your head ache," said Mrs. Murray, quite innocently, of course.

"One must try a change sometimes, however disagreeable," was the cool reply.

Meanwhile Maud took her seat, and Mr. Murray followed her down to the carriage-door.

"I pay your journey, Maud, and you must buy yourself a little present as you go through town," said he, as he put a bank note folded up tight and small into her hand. "Mind you don't lose it. Drive on, coachman," continued he, in the same breath; and for the first time, as he stood smiling complacently and genially on the doorstep, Maud saw the likeness she had never caught before, of the old man to the fair-haired, blue-eyed boy,

which passed for a picture of Mr. Murray in the days of his youth.

If his companions were silent and contemplative, Herbert was in the highest possible spirits, quite talkative for him; and at last he put the question Mand had been longing these two days for the opportunity of asking; for, somehow or other, since her journey had been decided on, she had been hardly a moment alone with Julian.

"You stay at Bankside till September I suppose, Murray?" began her brother.

"I am by no means sure of that; I think I have had pretty nearly enough of nepotism for this time," was the answer.

"When is your leave up?"

"I hardly know. I should not wonder if I cut the old regiment altogether, and never went back."

"What, sell out?" said Herbert, astonished.

Julian nodded.

"What do you mean to do; travel?" persisted his interlocutor.

"I hardly know what I intend as yet; it quite depends on the course of events. If we are to have war, as they say, I certainly shall not wish to give up my profession. By Christmas I shall know pretty well what fate has in store for me.

I sometimes think I shall go down and live at my uncle's place in Scotland; there's a good house, and it is a capital county for shooting, and no lack of neighbours. A man might be very happy, settled there."

"You would be very dull, I should imagine," remarked Herbert.

"That depends," said Julian, dryly, and turning to Maud, who all this while had sat very quiet and silent, he made some casual remark, and so ended the subject.

The train was just coming up. Herbert rushed into the office, and Julian passed straight on to the platform, with a silent and somewhat sad companion.

One phase of her life was ended; those happy days were gone, past all recal, and Maud knew it. Pleasant times she had known before, and might know again; but none in which oblivious of the past, and heedless of the future, in all singleness of heart and simplicity of purpose, would she surrender herself so freely to the untroubled charm of the present.

"Good-by, Maud," said Julian, and for a moment he held the little fluttering, trembling hand firmly in both of his. A porter opened the car-

riage door, she got in and sat down where her cousin bid her, but she did not speak, nor did he.

She was next the window ; there was a seat for Herbert opposite, and Julian stood a minute in silence, with his hand on the door ; then looking round, he bade the man go and see for Captain Bingley, and, despite of a brace of young ladies, who united to stare her out of countenance, and a middle-aged gentleman, who told him " it was hardly safe," leant in at the window to speak softly to the quiet figure in the corner.

" You must write to me, Maud, when it is settled what day you cross the water. Let me have a little letter, directed to Arthur's."

She looked up at him at last.

" I shall be on the wing soon ; I don't much fancy being left behind. Indeed, I should not wonder if you saw me before then ; perhaps I—"

Julian stopped abruptly ; Herbert's handsome, stalwart person was interposed between them. Maud had just time to hold out her hand, to catch one look from the deep blue eyes, which sought hers so pertinaciously, and they were speeding on their way to London.

There was one subject of which Herbert was never weary ; it lasted him all the way to Pad-

dington, and he carried it with him in the cab
own to its stronghold in Belgravia.

It was a dull, close, and dusty day, about the middle of August, and the streets and squares through which they passed, looked to Maud's eyes drear and dead, with their closed windows and withering flowers; even in the great thoroughfares the life and bustle seemed to stagnate, for all of London who had the means were gone, or going for their autumn holiday. The house in Chester Square partook of the general desolation; there was no sun without, no brightness within-doors. The last place Lady Louis Crichton affected was home, and the drawing-rooms looked as if they were rarely inhabited. They had not even the Bankside merit of being stiff and stately, still less did they present any token of the more homely attribute of comfort; evidently the lady of the house had no genius for furniture or arrangement, and it might be suspected, by those who knew her, that she devoted to her own person all those indescribable prettynesses, which other women love to lavish on their household shrines. The sole tokens of Lady Louis's presence were a French novel stuffed in between the cushions of the sofa, and an embroidered cambric handkerchief, and

broken bracelet lying upon a table, which stood beside the window.

Herbert took up this last, a serpent set with turquoise, with a locket pendant from the diamond-crowned head; on this was an inscription with a double cypher, which he hardly read ere he dropped the gorgeous bauble, as though he felt the sting, and Maud thought she heard him sigh. Any way his gay spirits were gone; he walked moodily up and down the room; and his sister, who was almost as susceptible to outward influences as himself, most heartily wished herself back at Bankside, and that not for the first time within the hour.

The French clock had chimed two successive quarters, and the brother and sister were still left alone. The auguries Maud drew were not of the happiest; and she was seriously thinking of begging Herbert to take her away, when a manservant appeared, who informed them "her ladyship wished to see Miss Bingley up-stairs, and that dinner was ordered for seven o'clock."

Herbert, to whom this last piece of information was specially addressed, did not speak, but walked down stairs; and Maud lacked the courage to run after him either to comfort or be comforted, particularly as she found Lady Louis Crichton's

French maid outside the door, waiting to convoy her up.

Her hostess met her at the top of the stairs, and her caressing manner for the moment did away with Maud's feeling of discomfort, though it was not enough to remove the sensation of strangeness, nor that of surprise which followed.

It was to no boudoir, or soft, luxurious dressing-room that Lady Louis led the way, but into a large front room, apparently devoted to wardrobes, strewn with dresses, and littered with artificial flowers, bonnets, ribbons, head dresses, and all the addenda of a fine lady's changeful toilet. There they sat down upon an imperial, to watch Nanette deep in the mysteries of packing.

After a few generalities, Lady Louis said, inquiringly: "Your brother is gone?"

Maud assented.

"I am glad to hear it," proceeded her ladyship, quite coolly. "Really, if the day were fixed for our marriage, he could not be more exacting."

Maud looked towards the hatchet-faced, bright-eyed little Frenchwoman.

"Never mind," said Lady Louis, following her look; "she does not understand English; at least not enough to make any mischief; that is why I

keep her. I want to talk to you about your brother; what am I to do?"

Maud was fairly puzzled. "I hoped—" she began.

"Pray don't, then," interposed her ladyship; "but do help me to bring Herbert to reason. I do not want to quarrel with him, but he really is too provoking."

"What has he done?" asked Maud, hardly knowing whether to laugh or be angry.

"He persecutes me incessantly to make up my mind; the last thing I am likely to do; and I only persuaded him to go down to Bankside by promising I would talk matters over with you."

"I conclude he wishes for a definite answer; and I hardly wonder that he should," said Maud, firmly.

"Well," rejoined Lady Louis, pettishly; "No is very easily said, but," and she smiled coquettishly, "I hardly think your brother would be satisfied with such a reply."

Afraid of injuring the cause, Herbert was so anxious she should promote, Maud was silent, and Lady Louis continued.

"If I make promises I am sure to break them. It would be much better to go on as we are; only

I cannot have him jealous and tyrannical, and you must tell him so."

Maud shook her head. "It is sport to you, but death to him."

"Never!" said Lady Louis, emphatically. "I've heard a great deal in the course of my life of men's dying of love; I never saw one a whit the nearer giving up the ghost, for all his professions."

"If ever a man was really and desperately in love, it is Herbert. He has not a thought or a wish, which is not centered in yourself," said Maud, earnestly.

"My dear, when you have seen as much of the world as I have," rejoined her ladyship, complacently, "you will know better. So long as he is not sure of one, your lover is all humble adoration; put yourself in his power, and the tables are turned directly; no more suing then, a word and a blow is the substitute. You need not look so shocked, it is oftener the case than you, in your simplicity, have dreamed of."

"You do not know Herbert," said Maud, proudly.

"Yes I do," was the quick reply, "or else I should not have hesitated so long. I know it is me he loves, and he would be the same, if I lost everything to-morrow. It is not so with most men."

"If you think this, why do you hesitate?" asked Maud; but her companion answered her own thoughts, rather than her words.

"He is too good and gentle for me. I can appreciate, but I could never obey him; I could not bow my will to his."

"According to your own theory," remarked Maud, "as a husband, Herbert would be authoritative and exacting enough."

"On the contrary, he would be just the same as he is now; I should offend him, and he would reproach me. That would make me grow bitter and angry, and I should say more than I meant. He would take it to heart, and I should be bored to extinction."

Such deductions sounded very like treason in Maud's ears; yet she could not deny that Lady Louis had sounded the depths of Herbert's nature most accurately.

Her ladyship saw her dilemma in an instant. "My dear child, you must not worry yourself about it. Depend on it, everything will come right in the end. Herbert must be reasonable, that is all. Come down, now, and have some luncheon. We must drive early, and be back in good time to dress and dine before the Opera;

there is nothing to keep us in the Park ; indeed, we must amuse ourselves shopping as best we may."

Maud was by no means sure Herbert would come to dinner, but he did, as also Sir Cuthbert Fielding, a bald-headed, plethoric old general, who paid Lady Louis Crichton very barefaced compliments, but had quite a different manner for Miss Bingley, a distinction one less blind than Herbert would hardly have failed to observe.

It was the closing opera-night of that season ; and if the boxes were but indifferently filled, the stalls were mostly tenanted, and thence there was a constant flow of visitors to Lady Louis Crichton's box ; men who could not tear themselves from London, or who were not in funds for Scotland ; guardsmen doing duty now, for the sake of obtaining leave when hunting began ; and birds of passage, just resting on the wing preparatory for September shooting, were all glad to find a familiar face left. Nor was Lady Louis sorry to have the opportunity of parading a pretty long train of admirers before Maud. It was an anomaly certainly, but she was really anxious to secure the good opinion of her shy, quiet, unobtrusive companion. A subtle instinct warned her that Maud misdoubted

her, even in appreciating her kindness to herself; so for the nonce all her well-practised coqueties and graceful *agaceries* of manner were laid aside, and a pensive softness assumed in their stead, subjugating Herbert more completely than ever, and confirming him in his opinion, that his sister's presence would have the happiest effect in influencing his fate.



CHAPTER XXI.

"The town! what is there in the town, to lure
Our household dreams away?
Is not the town a monster? ravenous?
Fierce? Hydra-headed? fed by peasants' strength?

PROCTER.

LADY Louis Crichton was in no hurry to leave town; even when empty, she liked London better than any other place, affirming that, at its dullest, it had more attractions than she found elsewhere, and that a garret in the metropolis was preferable, in her opinion, to a palace in the country. Besides, her life had two distinct phases, the indolent and the gay. When the former mood predominated, she would, according to the caprices of our climate, either lie on the sofa in her dressing-gown, or sit in an arm-chair before the fire by the hour together; if she could secure an agreeable feminine *confidante* so much the better, if not, she could pass the time pleasantly enough over a French novel, and burnish up the weapons of her warfare, as it were, in reading how others of the genus coquette sported with the feelings, or ex-

cited the passions of their admirers, for they were not the best of books with which the fair widow fed her mind.

She really liked Maud; as she told Herbert over and over his "sister was so different from other girls," and, it might be, therein lay the charm. Such women as Lady Louis Crichton are rarely even-tempered, tranquil, or content; there is a gnawing worm, an insatiable thirst, which is scarce to be scotched, or quenched. She did not trouble herself with her own deficiencies, but she marvelled to see her guest so easily amused, cheerful, and serene; and almost envied her, her youth, her freshness, and genuine capacity for enjoyment. There must have been something contagious in that calm, alluring in this same repose, for many a time in the course of that week, Ada Crichton seriously revolved marrying Herbert Bingley, and bethought herself, by way of a step towards domesticity, of making it a stipulation, that Maud should live with them.

It was a new state of mind for her, and one with which love had very little to do. Lady Louis had played with that edged tool too often to be susceptible of its keen smart, it was rather a secret dissatisfaction and weariness with things as they were, and a restless craving for change, which fed

for long years an excitement of the most trivial description, perpetually called for some fresh stimulus, and now made her fancy that a complete revolution in all her habits, associations, and mode of life must be a certain cure for the *ennui* to which she was a constant prey, and which, in her sentimental moments, she fancied to be the result of her isolated—rather than, as it really was, of her selfish—life.

What she called quiet was great gaiety to her guest. They were never at home a single evening. Lady Louis, who would have yawned away the hours with difficulty in her own drawing-room, was always bright and animated elsewhere; she liked an excuse for going the round of the theatres, and when these resources failed her, there was still Greenwich and Richmond, to say nothing of the fireworks at Cremorne, to fall back upon. Herbert was always in attendance, and, for the time being, perfectly happy; he had no particular rival, and from the one or two gentlemen on whom Lady Louis rang the changes, in her determination always to make up the *quartette*, he felt he had nothing to fear.

Maud, who had no thought of either flirtations or conquests, was easily content. All that she saw and heard, had the charm of novelty for her, besides she carried about with her a secret ray

of happiness which gilded all she looked upon ; her whole heart expanded with this new sensation, it softened her manner to all the world, it heightened her personal charms, and restored to her the confidence in herself, and others, which had well nigh died a violent death.

Others noticed the change. Lady Louis openly said she had grown more womanly and less shy, in the course of the last two months, but no one except nurse Bridget penetrated to the source and spring of this new-found happiness.

Every morning and evening duly brought Bridget to attend her young lady's toilet ; she was living in a busy street hard by, striving, with her modest means and energetic spirit, to preserve a widowed niece with an orphan family, from being swept away, and utterly lost in the great sea of London. Duty was the old woman's watchword, duty towards God and towards man ; it sweetened her toil, it smoothed her path, and strengthened her " to rise up early and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness."

It grieved Maud to see fresh wrinkles and new lines graven on the withered brow and puckered cheeks. It was the old story, long credit and neglected payments, had brought distress and trouble, to the honest tradesman's door.

"You see, Miss Bingley," said Bridget, when Maud was questioning her, "we have to pay ready money in Covent Garden, and it's often the end of the season when families leave town, before the bill is paid. If it were not for the little I receive, every half year, Susan would be sore troubled to put bread in her children's mouths."

"It seems a very sad case, can nothing be done?" said Maud.

"I try to persuade her it would be better not to serve houses where they don't pay weekly. Half, and more than half the custom, would go, sure enough, but what remained would be safe."

"And why does not your niece follow your advice?"

"Poor soul! she hasn't the heart, but, as I tell her, if poor John had stood firm, he would be alive now."

"I fancied he died of consumption," said Maud.

"My dear young lady, if ever human being died of a broken heart, it was him. He had lived footman with Lord M——, and the family had all their greengrocery of him, and, poor fellow! he thought the money as safe as the bank. My Lord lost thousands horse-racing, had to go off abroad, and poor John's hundred-and-fifty pounds were nothing to what was owing elsewhere. He never held up his head after."

“ And the poor widow ? ”

“ My Lord’s father paid fifty pounds, and Susan was glad to get as much as that, but all their savings went, what with the rent, and his illness, and the doctor ; and when I came she had no money to buy stock, and nobody came near the shop.”

“ But the day I came to find you I thought I never had seen a greengrocer’s shop look so neat and pretty, and Lady Louis Crichton said the same. You remember she bought all the grapes and apricots.”

“ Yes,” said Bridget, “ she’s a pleasant-spoken lady enough ; but, excuse me, Miss Bingley, when the time comes that you have a house of your own, don’t forget what I’ve told you. Gentlefolks don’t mean to be hard, only they don’t know how difficult it is to earn a living.”

“ If the day ever comes that finds me in a home of my own,” said Maud, with a smile Bridget thought was conscious, “ you will come and live with me and look after my housekeeping.”

“ I should well like to see my young lady comfortably settled,” was the cautious rejoinder, but though a certain delicacy of feeling, often found in that class, kept her from saying more, the old nurse was very anxious respecting one who had so long been her charge, and with all her simplicity,

and for all her lowly station, Bridget knew the world better than did Maud.

She had not been slow to perceive the position Captain Murray filled in her young lady's estimation: she asked no questions, but it cost her many a sleepless night and careful day.

"Mr. Arthur's over the seas, Mr. Herbert gives no thought to anyone but the grand lady he loves, and Mr. Edgeworth keeps out of the way, and no one knows anything of him. There's not one single person to advise my young lady, unless it were that Mrs. Murray's greatly altered."

She it was whom Bridget doubted. Before her marriage and after, in adversity and prosperity, Miss Edgeworth and Mrs. Murray had been one and the same in character.

"It's riches and grandeur, she gives her heart to," thought Bridget, "and what has my young lady beyond her sweet face and winning ways? Her little fortune is nothing in the eyes of those who have thousands a-year. Many's the true love that's been quenched and blighted for no better cause, than that money must match with money. Mr. Murray's the same and yet different; he's hard, but he was always just; and many's the time I've known him stand up for the children's rights as equals, though the one was his own kith and

kin, and the others had no claim on him. I wonder what Mr. Julian's grown up like, but I daren't ask for the world, and love they say is blind."

Bridget pondered, and thought, how she could throw in a word of caution and advice; she did not like to speak openly, but at last, one evening when Maud alluded to Herbert's hopes, she took occasion to state her views on the subject generally.

"I've often heard marriage to be a lottery," began Bridget, apparently intent on smoothing out the folds of a dress she held in her hand, "but I somehow think the old saying comes nearer the truth, and 'marriages are made in heaven.'"

"I had rather, far rather believe it is so," was the fervent answer.

"Inside my mother's wedding ring," proceeded Bridget, "were engraved these words:—

'In Christ and Thee my trust shall be;'

that carried her through a deal of trouble."

"Yes Bridget," said Maud, simply.

"It may be an old-fashioned notion, but if it were more thought of, there would not be so many disappointments and sorrows in married life," said Bridget. "Love is a fearful thing and a wonderful thing, yet being so strong, it's strange how a little matter will often cross it. Ah! well-a-day,

it's no use talking, it's the same with gentle and simple, a sore trouble oft."

"Love bears all, atones for all," said Maud. She spoke with the faith, and hope, and freshness of her years, but in the inexperience of youth, which knows not, that the all in all of a woman's happiness, is but a pleasing interlude in a man's career.

"I don't know," said Bridget, thoughtfully, "I remember it was hard to think that what I felt was all as nothing. I was older than you, Miss Maud, by five or six years before I fixed my mind, and I thought and said much the same, begging your pardon. The young man he came from London with others to do some work in our village, and we walked together, the summer and winter through. The works were finished and he went back the next spring to London again, and his friends persuaded him a poor country girl was no wife for him. When he was with them it was all one way, and when with me it was the other. He came backwards and forwards often and often, and all the neighbours said it only rested with me to hold him firm, but I was too proud to plead, or for that matter to show half the love that filled my heart; I did not think it could be, but before the new year came he had married a tradesman's daughter up in London."

"He was not worthy of such love," exclaimed Maud, indignantly.

"My dear," said the old woman, meekly, "that is easy said, and many have tried to heal a sore heart with that same salve, but love is love whatever comes betwixt it."

"And you were very unhappy," was the softened comment. "Dear Bridget, how did you live and bear it?"

"It's not so easy as people think for the young and strong to die, and till we are tried, Miss Bingley, we do not know how much we can bear and live; besides I'd no time to maunder and fade away. Father broke his leg, mother was crippled with the rheumatism, and I had to leave my place to wait on them, and work hard besides to keep the wolf from the door. I mind one thing well, as the time came round, I could not bear to see the violets in the hedgerows, nor the cowslips on the uplands. Never of my free-will should I have had a walk, if mother had not made me; but neither the heavens nor the earth had brightness in them for me. I could toil, but I could not think."

"And did anything else happen? Tell me, Bridget," questioned her attentive listener.

"All this time, I would have given anything to get away over the seas, anywhere to be quit of the

miserable feeling, which waking or sleeping I had on me ; and I got my wish, but not in the way I thought. First mother died, then we buried father, Will enlisted, Martha married, and I was left alone."

" Dear Bridget, what sorrows you have borne ! "

" So I thought then, but no, my path was made straight ; God opened a door for me at last. "

" How, Bridget ? "

" I had the offer of a place in a distant county. It was not easy to give satisfaction at first, but after a time came two little children to the house, whom I soon learned to love better than father or mother, brother or sister. I don't know which crept nearest to my heart, Master Arthur or Miss Maud. "

" Dear Bridget ! " and Maud stretched out her hand.

" My dear young lady, " was the answer almost whispered, " take thought before it's too late. There's nothing so sweet as the first page of love's story, but the last is oft writ in heart's blood and tears. "

END OF VOL. I.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in financial matters. The text outlines various methods for organizing and storing data, including digital databases and physical filing systems. It also mentions the need for regular audits and reviews to ensure the integrity of the information.

2. The second section focuses on the role of communication in the organization. It highlights the importance of clear and concise communication channels, both internally and externally. The text discusses the benefits of regular meetings, reports, and newsletters in keeping everyone informed and engaged. It also touches upon the importance of listening to feedback and addressing concerns promptly.

3. The third part of the document addresses the issue of resource management. It discusses how to effectively allocate and utilize the organization's resources, including human capital, financial assets, and physical infrastructure. The text provides guidelines for prioritizing tasks and projects, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively. It also mentions the importance of monitoring and evaluating resource usage to identify areas for improvement.

4. The final section discusses the importance of maintaining a strong and positive organizational culture. It emphasizes that a healthy culture is the foundation for long-term success and sustainability. The text outlines various strategies for fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and high performance. It also mentions the importance of recognizing and rewarding employees for their contributions and achievements.



